Computer active

ISSUE 712 | 18 JUNE – 1 JULY 2025

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USE WHATSAPP ON YOUR iPAD

Finally! But there's a catch p6

UPDATE SOFTWARE USING A USB STICK

☑Any program ☑Any PC p38

DON'T PAY FOR MOBILE ROAMING

Avoid hidden phone fees in Europe and beyond p60

Chat's how you make your own AI bot – p74

WATCH TV ANYWHERE!

Unblock ALL restrictions to access your favourite channels, apps & services – no matter *where* you are p50

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- ☑ Stream TV from your home PC
- ☑ Save TV shows to a portable drive
- ☑ Take your TV sticks with you

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Content Director Marc Chacksfield
Group Editor Daniel Booth
Deputy Editor Robert Irvine
Production Editor Graham Brown
Art Editor Katie Peat
Contributors Keumars Afifi-Sabet, Dinah Greek, Richard Holt, Jonathan Parkyn, Nik Rawlinson, Andy Shaw

Advertising Manager Alexandra Thomas
Subscriptions Sheri Taubes
Head of Production Stephen Catherall
Senior Production Manager Lawrence Brookes

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hello@eucompliancepartner.com
+3375690241

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Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**
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From the Editor

I remember as a kid my Dad explaining we could set timers on our Betamax to record programmes while we were on holiday. I was astounded. I could spend a week in arcades in Butlins then return and watch the episodes of *Top of the Pops*, *Tomorrow's World* and *Grange Hill* that I'd missed.

Today's technology means we can take our TV with us wherever we go – and that includes watching UK shows when abroad. You will, however, need to use VPNs to unblock geographical restrictions, and possibly fake your location too, as Robert Irvine explains in his Cover Feature.

He also reveals the best ways to download shows before you set off, and what you need to stream remotely from your home PC. We've got a week in Devon this summer, so I've already packed my Roku stick alongside suncream (optimistic) and waterproofs (inevitable). If you do plan to watch TV on your phone abroad, make sure you don't get clobbered by roaming charges (see page 60).

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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2K
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£6
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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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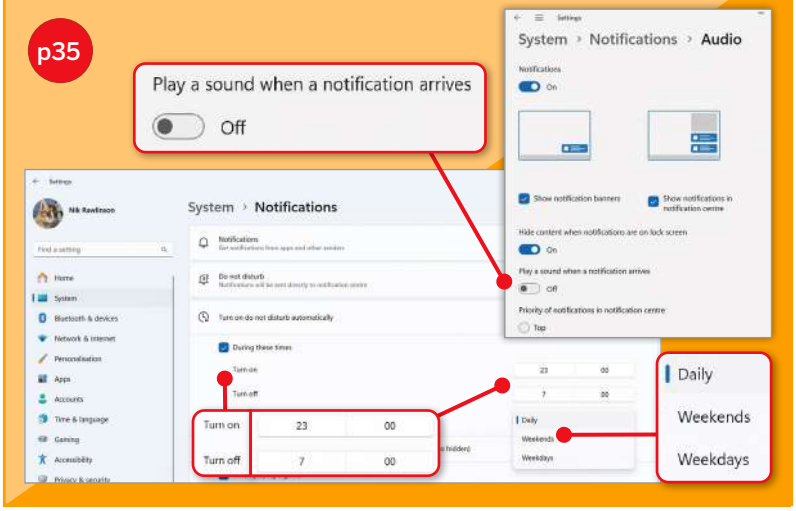

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sky
plex
itvX

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Pixel perfect

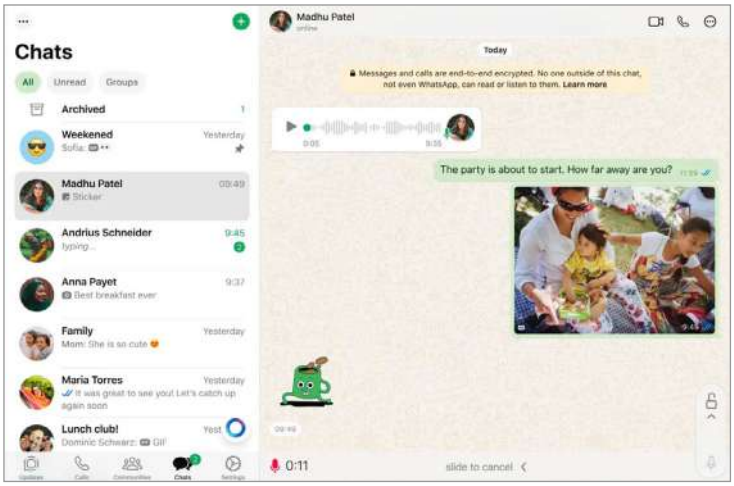
WhatsApp arrives on the iPad after 15-year wait

Meta has finally released WhatsApp for the iPad, more than 15 years after it first appeared on phones.

An iPad app for the popular messaging service had become one of the most eagerly awaited tools ever.

It has been available on Android tablets for several years, but for most of that time it was simply a scaled-up version of the phone app, not built especially for larger screens.

The new app has many of the same features as its iPhone and Android equivalents, but it's been redesigned to take advantage of the iPad's larger screen. The new two-column layout shows chats and contacts on the left and messages on the right (pictured), mirroring Apple's own Messages app.



It supports iPadOS, which is Apple's operating system built especially for iPads. This means it works with features exclusive to iPadOS, including Split View, Slide Over and Stage Manager.

With Split View you can run two apps side by side, each taking up part of the screen. So, for example, you could read WhatsApp messages on one side of your screen and search the internet on a web browser on the other.

As you scroll through a web page, you can instantly copy links or details into the WhatsApp chat without switching apps.

Stage Manager lets you resize windows and quickly switch between groups of apps, as you can on a computer desktop. You could use it to have WhatsApp and Apple's Notes and Calendar apps all open in windows that you can drag and resize while jotting things down.

The Slide Over feature places a small floating version of an app on top of what you're already using. You can therefore place WhatsApp on top of a video or website, letting you read and reply to messages without pausing what's happening underneath.

You'll still need your phone

Like the phone version, you can make audio and video calls with up to 32 people, use both the rear and front device cameras, and share your screen with other people during a call.

It works with Apple's Magic Keyboard, letting you type messages using the physical keyboard. It also works with the Apple Pencil – mainly for tapping, scrolling and navigating the screen –though not for writing messages.

However, to use the iPad app you'll still need to sign into your WhatsApp account with an iPhone or Android phone.

First, install WhatsApp on your iPad from the App Store (www.snipca.com/55088), then open it and you'll see a QR code.

Next, open WhatsApp on your phone. On an iPhone tap Settings at the bottom right, then 'Linked devices'. On Android, tap the three dots at the top right, then 'Linked devices'. Now scan the code on your iPad using your phone.

Once linked, you can use WhatsApp on your iPad even if your phone is offline.

WHAT WE THINK

This iPad app has taken more than twice as long to build as the Channel Tunnel. Its owners Meta frequently adds features to Facebook and Instagram, but those exist to keep users hooked so they can be shown more adverts. WhatsApp mercifully has no adverts. That's one of the reasons it's so popular, but it also means Meta can't make big bucks out of it. Without that financial motivation, an iPad app was never a priority. Better (very) late than never though.

WHATSAPP ENDS SUPPORT FOR OLDER PHONES

To run WhatsApp on your phone you now need to run iOS 15.1 or later on iPhones, or Android 5.0 or later. These systems were released in 2021 and 2014 respectively. WhatsApp dropped support for phones running earlier systems on 1 June. It means popular phones such as iPhone 5s, iPhone 6, Samsung Galaxy S III and Sony Xperia Z can no longer run WhatsApp. Read more at www.snipca.com/55089.

You'll like this...
More O2 customers can now roll over unused phone data (www.snipca.com/55093)

but not this...
New Android malware adds fake contacts to your phone (www.snipca.com/55091)

Facebook and NHS passwords among 184 million leaked

Millions of usernames and passwords for Facebook, Google, Instagram, Microsoft, the NHS and PayPal have been found online in one of the biggest data leaks of recent years.

Security researcher Jeremiah Fowler discovered the 47GB database in early May, writing about it online at www.snipca.com/55116. He said it contained more than 184 million unencrypted login details.

Fowler reported it to the company hosting the site it was listed on, which then removed it.

The hosting company did not disclose who owned the site, so it remains unclear whether the database was deliberately published by criminals or accidentally left exposed by a legitimate organisation or research project.

Fowler said he didn't know how long the records had been exposed, but added they showed signs of being used by "some type of infostealer malware".

This means they could have been used to infect computers with malware that runs undetected in the background to steal sensitive data such as bank and credit-card details and recovery keys.

He wrote to several of the email accounts found in the database to verify the authenticity of the data and was able to confirm this based on the replies that he received.

While the database is no longer online and has yet to appear on any sites that let you check whether your details were included, the scale of the breach means you should be alert to any strange activity involving the accounts mentioned above.

You should also consider changing your passwords for those accounts, especially if you use the same password across more than one.

Fowler warned that people should stop using "their email accounts like free cloud storage" by keeping "tax forms, medical records, contracts and passwords" in their inboxes.

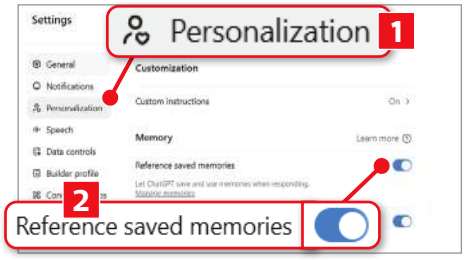
ChatGPT now saves your chats for free

ChatGPT will now remember your recent conversations for free as long as you're logged into your account.

Previously, it would remember chats only if you were paying for a subscription.

OpenAI, which runs the AI chatbot, said that "as you chat with ChatGPT, whether you're typing, talking or asking it to generate an image, it can remember helpful context from earlier conversations, such as your preferences and interests, and use that to tailor its responses".

It added that you can ask it to remember specific details, giving the example, "Remember that I am vegetarian when you recommend a recipe". To check what ChatGPT remembers, type "What do you remember about me?".



However, memory for free users will be limited to recent conversations. OpenAI didn't say how far back this is, but tests suggest it's about a week. If you subscribe, ChatGPT remembers all your chats.

To use memory for free, click your profile icon at the top right followed by Settings. Now click Personalization (1 in our screenshot) then turn on 'Reference saved memories' 2.

You can also turn on 'Reference chat history' to let ChatGPT refer to recent conversations when responding. Read more at www.snipca.com/55114.

IN BRIEF

ONE PLUS PAD 3 TAKES ON iPAD

Chinese firm OnePlus has launched a 13.2in tablet to rival the iPad. Priced £529, the Pad 3 (pictured below) has 12GB RAM, 256GB storage and a 3392x2400-pixel resolution. The £599 version increases this to 16GB and 512GB. Battery life when playing videos is 18 hours. We'll review it soon. Buy from www.snipca.com/55120.

ASDA CUTS PRICE OF SIM-ONLY DEALS

Asda Mobile has cut the price of its Pay Monthly 24-month unlimited data plan from £23 to £19 a month. It's one of several cheaper SIM-only deals, including for 12-month contracts and pay-as-you-go. They're all for 5G and all have unlimited calls and texts. For details see www.snipca.com/55119.

• Don't pay for mobile roaming – page 60

TOMORROW'S WORLD

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a soggy pizza in a Deliveroo drone. These are being tested in Dublin as the company aims to "unlock new customers through super-fast deliveries". They might come to the UK if the Civil Aviation Authority gives permission. Read more at www.snipca.com/55112 and watch them in action at www.snipca.com/55113.

IN BRIEF

FAULTY LI-ION TIKTOK CHARGER RECALLED

A Lithium-ion charger sold on TikTok has been recalled because it carries a serious risk of causing an electric shock. The 4220 charger (pictured), made in China, has pins that aren't the correct length and so can't be safely plugged in. TikTok has removed the listing. Read more at www.snipca.com/55073.

VODAFONE & THREE OPEN SITE AFTER MERGER

Vodafone and Three have launched a new website to mark the completion of their merger at the end of May. You'll find updates from the new company, now officially called VodafoneThree, at www.vodafonethree.com.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

This is former OpenAI scientist Ilya Sutskever who in 2023 recommended moving its workers to a "doomsday bunker" in case its AI tools caused a global catastrophe. This unsettling revelation comes from a new book on the rise of OpenAI (www.snipca.com/55072). Maybe AI should stick to otters making pizzas (see page 49).

Councils block BT plan to replace payphones with Street Hubs

Local councils are blocking BT's plan to replace 2,000 payphones with Street Hubs (pictured) offering free public Wi-Fi at speeds up to 1Gbps.

The company wants to install the kiosks in over 200 towns and cities, having already converted 1,000 payphones into hubs across the country.

As well as gigabit Wi-Fi within 150 metres, they provide USB charging, free UK calls and a dedicated 999 calling button.

They also show digital adverts and contain small battery cells to boost 4G and 5G coverage nearby.

BT announced plans for the extra hubs last year, saying they represent a "further step into the future".

But residents and councillors have said they're too big and modern for some historic streets.

Dursley Town Council in Gloucestershire called them "alien" and "incongruous", with an "inappropriate design".

Bristol City Council has rejected planning permission for 27 sites following 750 objections from residents. It said the kiosks "would occupy valuable walkway space, restricting the flow of pedestrian movement and hindering accessibility for individuals with mobility issues".

It added that pedestrians could be at risk because the hubs block their views when crossing the road and serve as a distraction.

Councils in Salisbury, Stroud and Swindon have also refused planning permission.

A BT spokesman told the website ISPreview that the hubs support the company's "Universal Service Obligation to provide a public call service in the UK" and that it will continue to work with councils to "refine our location selection process".

Do you think BT's Street Hubs look "alien"? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Microsoft: all USB-C ports will "just work" on new Windows laptops

Microsoft has vowed to end "USB-C port confusion" by forcing Windows laptops and tablets to use the same standards.

It said this would mean all USB-C ports will "just work", whether being used to transfer data, charge devices or connect to a monitor.

This requirement is now part of the company's Windows Hardware Compatibility Program (WHCP), which sets the rules hardware makers must follow to get their devices certified for Windows.

In addition, 40Gbps USB-C ports must work with both USB 4.0 and Thunderbolt 3 devices.

It applies only to new laptops and tablets that come installed with Windows 11 24H2, released last autumn.

Writing online (www.snipca.com/55074), Microsoft engineer Ugan Sivagnanenthirarajah said that currently "not all USB-C ports are created equal" and that "you can't tell which ones deliver the full experience just by looking at them".

He added: "PC manufacturers can implement ports that look identical but differ wildly in functionality: one may charge your laptop and run a 4K display; another might only deliver USB 2.0 data speeds."

These discrepancies are allowed in the specifications for USB, he said, leading to "frustration, guesswork, and endless troubleshooting".

Sky launches Glass Air TVs for £6 a month

Sky has launched its cheapest ever Glass TVs, letting you pay them off for £6 a month.

Called Glass Air, they come in three screen sizes: 43, 55 and 65 inches. You can buy these outright for £309, £509 and £649 respectively, or pay £6, £10 or £13 a month to spread the cost over 48 months.

You can instead choose to pay off the TV over 24 months for double the monthly fee. Whichever you choose, you own the TV outright at the end.

You also need to pay a £20 upfront fee, and then subscribe to a Sky TV package, starting at £15 a month for new customers for Sky Essential. This has over 100 channels and services, including Sky Atlantic, Discovery+ and Netflix.

That means the cheapest monthly cost for Sky Glass Air is £21, comprising £6 for a 43in TV and £15 for a Sky Essential subscription.

The Sky Glass Air range has the same 4K Quantum Dot HDR screen as the standard Glass TVs, but not the Dolby Atmos soundbar. Instead, it has simpler 2.0 stereo speakers, which don't have a subwoofer or extra channels for surround-sound effects. This makes the sets smaller and lighter.

The TVs come in three colours – Sea Green, Carbon Grey and Cotton White. The remote control and stand comes in the same colour you pick.

The cheapest you can pay for the standard Sky Glass TV is £29 a month, comprising £14 for the 43in set and £15 for Sky Essential.

The £14 monthly cost increases to £19 a month for 55in and £24 for 65in. Upfront the TVs cost £699, £949 or £1,199 respectively – see Issue 708 (page 29) for our review.

We'll review the Glass Air TV soon. Visit Sky's site for more details: www.snipca.com/55060.

New adverts tell customers to phone 150 for landline-switch help

Landline phones switching to digital could stop telecare alarms working.
Call the landline provider now for support.
BT

BT and Virgin Media O2 have jointly launched a campaign to tell telecare users that help is available during the switchover from analogue to digital phone lines.

They are running adverts that urge people to call 150 on their landline if they need assistance. This puts them through to their relevant support team.

The ads are part of a Government-backed national awareness campaign aimed at reassuring people worried about the switch.

It will emphasise that engineers will visit the homes of vulnerable people on the day their landline is due to be switched to digital, and that a battery backup is available so telecare users can still contact emergency services during a power cut.

Rob Orr, Chief Operations Officer at Virgin Media O2, said the campaign "marks a significant moment where two industry leaders have come together to raise awareness of the digital landline switchover".

Claire Gillies, BT Group's Consumer CEO, said it's "incredibly important that nobody gets left behind, and we encourage telecare users and their carers to contact their provider to ensure a smooth switch".

BT has separately teamed up with veteran newsreader Moira Stuart to raise awareness of the switch (see Issue 710, page 9).

It coincides with a fresh effort to roll out BT Digital Voice to vulnerable customers in four regions: East of England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Yorkshire & Humber.

Watch the new advert on YouTube at www.snipca.com/55058.

IN BRIEF

MORE ADS COMING TO YOUTUBE LITE

Google has told YouTube Premium Lite subscribers that from 30 June it will show more ads in Shorts videos, as well as in music content and when you search or browse – though "most videos will continue to remain ad-free". Premium Lite, which was relaunched in the UK in April, is a middle tier between the free version (with regular adverts) and Premium (no adverts). It costs £7.99 a month – see www.snipca.com/55065.

WATCH NEW RETRO SHOWS ON REWIND TV

Nostalgia channel Rewind TV is bringing three new UK shows to its line up. From 24 June it will show 1970s sitcom *A Sharp Intake of Breath* starring David Jason. This will be followed from 2 July by the panel show *Jokers Wild*, hosted by Barry Cryer, and from 20 July by *Old Country*, featuring Jack Hargreaves. Rewind is available on Freeview (channel 92), Freely (150) and Sky (182).

UPDATE YOUR ASUS ROUTER NOW

Asus has released a firmware update to fix a flaw (CVE-2023-39780) that hackers have exploited to infect over 9,000 routers, turning them into part of a botnet. Install the update by searching for your router at www.snipca.com/55056. Affected models include the RT-AX55 (pictured), RT-AX59U and RT-AX86U.

Does Windows 10 put you on the 'wrong' side of risk?

Microsoft's latest "insane" advert for upgrading has angered many users

Microsoft's new YouTube advert (www.snipca.com/55122) promoting Windows 11 starts simply enough, with the onscreen message: 'Security updates for Windows 10 are ending 14 October, 2025'. No arguing with that – it's a matter of fact. Microsoft would be negligent not to keep hammering it home.

But then the hard sell begins. The next message is 'Upgrade now to a Windows 11 Pro PC', which seems to forget that the cheaper Windows 11 Home exists (though we haven't – see our discounted offers: www.snipca.com/55126). This is a surprisingly elitist choice if Microsoft is serious about convincing the 650 million people still using Windows 10 to upgrade.

THE FACTS

- Microsoft has released an advert claiming that switching from Windows 10 to 11 puts you on the "right side of risk"
- It encourages you to buy a new Windows 11 Pro computer capable of performing advanced AI tasks
- Windows 10's market share actually rose in May, for the first time since late 2024

The top comment on the advert (from @LanceOzminski) sums up what many think: "Using the end of support for your old operating system as a selling point for your new one is actually insane". It suggests Microsoft's marketing tactic is both shameless and manipulative – like sawing the legs off your chair and then offering to sell you a new one.

> "Microsoft's tactic is like sawing the legs off your chair and then offering to sell you a new one"

However, it's the next phrase in the advert that's really angered people. Microsoft says that upgrading to Windows 11 Pro means you'll 'stay on the right side of risk' (pictured). The implication? That sticking with Windows 10 places you on the 'wrong' side of risk.

This wording makes it sound like a moral choice, as though Microsoft is branding Windows 10 users as wilfully reckless or irresponsible. It's essentially a sales pitch dressed as a warning.

That doesn't mean it won't prove an effective marketing campaign, of course. Nobody wants to be on the wrong side of anything – whether it's history, public opinion or the risks that come with using an unsupported operating system. And the advert appears aimed more at people whose jobs depend on this – heads of IT departments who'll have the budget to buy expensive AI-powered machines running Windows 11 Pro.

But Microsoft's problem is that most Windows 10 users want clear, unbiased advice, not glossy adverts spiked with provocative statements. They regard Windows almost like a nationalised service, something stable, dependable and long-lasting – more like a piece of infrastructure or a public utility than a disposable consumer product. For them, upgrading requires something like an impartial public awareness campaign a government would run.

Contrast that with Microsoft's marketing department, which sees the end of Windows 10 as its best opportunity in years to sell new computers.

Notably, the adverts don't mention the Extended Security Updates (ESUs) that Microsoft is offering home users. These will continue to provide security updates for 12 months after 14 October, and cost $30 per device (it hasn't confirmed UK pricing, but it's likely to be around £30). Yet this is the kind of information Windows 10 users would expect Microsoft to give in any communication about the end of support.

Microsoft is probably past caring what Windows 10 users think though. It just wants to shove them on to Windows 11 and close the lid on its predecessor.

And it must've been worried by new figures showing that Windows 10's market share actually *grew* in May, up to 53.19 per cent – the first increase since last December. A few months ago Windows 11 looked like it might overtake 10 before October. That now seems unlikely. Visit www.snipca.com/55123 and see how the purple line (representing Windows 10) and blue line (11) are now running parallel.

Microsoft has spent the past couple of years trying everything to push Windows 11. All it has left is the hard sell. It has just four months to persuade hundreds of millions of people to upgrade. This advert might seem tame compared with what's coming as the deadline approaches.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Huge rise in SIM-swap scams

What's the threat?

Criminals are becoming better at SIM-swap fraud, allowing them to steal your online identity. First, the scammer gains some data onyou the victim, usually through a phishing scam or by buying leaked databases on the dark web.

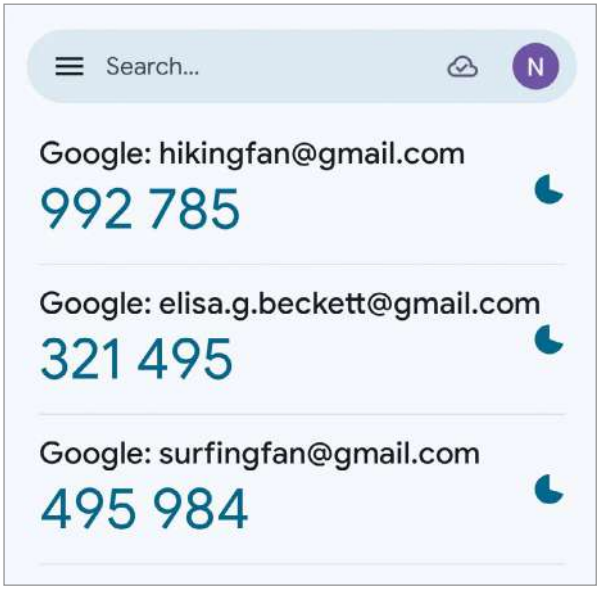
They then phone your network and impersonate you in order to transfer your number on to a SIM card they own. Next, they intercept calls and texts to this number, including two-factor authentication codes, letting them sign into your bank account and other sensitive services. They can also access your emails and even commit fraud in your name.

This attack is called a SIM swap, and there were nearly 3,000 incidents in 2024 – up from 289 in 2023 (a rise of 1,055 per cent) – as reported by networks to CIFAS, the UK's largest fraud-prevention service. Nearly a third of cases target those aged 61 or over (see www.snipca.com/54974).

It's believed that it was one of the techniques used in the recent cyber-attacks on Marks & Spencer and the Co-op.

How can you stay safe?

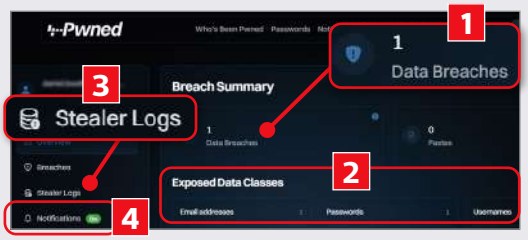
Cifas has called on networks to strengthen their security against SIM swaps, but you should also take measures to protect yourself. Most important is to ask your network to add extra security features to prevent scammers impersonating you, such as a PIN code, password or security question.



Also consider using an authenticator app – such as Google's (www.snipca.com/54977, pictured) or Microsoft's (www.snipca.com/54976) – for receiving two-factor codes. These are installed on your phone, so the scammer would need access to your device, not just transfer your number to their SIM card.

New tools | Have I Been Pwned?'s new look

Since launching in 2013, Have I Been Pwned? (HIBP?) has become an essential aid to staying safe online. Recently, however, its design was starting to look a little tired, with too much information on the homepage and no central place to check your details. A relaunch in May means it looks more modern and is much easier to use.



Visit the homepage (https://haveibeenpwned.com) and you'll notice it no longer has a list of data breaches. You can still type your email address though, and any breach it's been leaked in will be listed as a scrollable timeline. Click 'View Details' for information on what happened.

Also new is a Dashboard, which you can open by clicking the button at the top right of the homepage. The 'Breach Summary' shows you how many breaches have included your details (1 in our screenshot), and whether they involve emails, passwords or usernames 2. The menu on the left gives you access to more information on breaches and stealer logs 3, and shows whether you've asked HIBP? to notify you of breaches 4.

For more details on the redesign, read the blog from the site's creator Troy Hunt: www.snipca.com/54971.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

'Letterbox hamper from M&S' email

I regularly shop on Marks & Spencer's website, so I've been keeping an eye out for scams since it was hacked in April. In May, I received an email with the heading 'A Thoughtful Gift from M&S'. Because I'm a "valued customer" it was giving me an "Afternoon Tea Letterbox Hamper" free with my next order. How lovely! It contains a "selection of indulgent treats" and has been "carefully packaged to fit through the letterbox". I thought it couldn't be much of a hamper if it's that small. The button at the bottom told me to 'Unwrap my free surprise'. Instead I deleted the email.

Paul Irons

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Amazon driver 'stole my bread maker'

I had a similar experience to Frank Griffiths ('Amazon driver drove off without delivering my item', Letters, Issue 711). During the Covid lockdown I ordered a Yamaha bread maker from Amazon. The delivery van pulled up outside my home about 20 minutes after I received the email with the security code to give to the driver. I watched through my blinds as he checked his device, then saw me watching him.

He pulled out the box from the back of the van. This was the Yamaha product box showing the item, not the plain Amazon box. He then put the box back into his van, got back into the driver's seat, tapped away on his device then drove off. I then received an email within one minute telling me that I had received the package and had given the driver the correct code.

I immediately contacted Amazon Support and reported I hadn't received the package, only to be told the driver swears I gave him the code. I then replied that Amazon's own Ring Doorbell footage will prove him a liar. I sent them footage of the incident captured by my Ring, and received a full refund within 24 hours.

I heard later from a different driver that a lot of drivers from that particular delivery hub had been sacked due to high theft rates. Most were caught by video doorbells.

Steve Narborough

CA SAYS **Steve's right that Amazon takes doorbell footage seriously as evidence and has sacked drivers based on videos customers have sent (sometimes for truly revolting behaviour: see www.snipca.com/55037). The footage doesn't have to be from a Ring doorbell, but it might help to support your claim. After all, Amazon is hardly going to ignore the potential value of footage captured by a device they make.**

However, downloaded Ring footage doesn't include a timestamp, which makes it harder for the company to place a driver at your home at a particular time. Therefore make sure you also email a screenshot of the Ring app showing the video, because this does contain the time it was taken. Capturing footage of deliveries was one of the reasons we gave for buying a video doorbell in Issue 707's Cover Feature – buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55030.

Avoiding adverts on ITVX Premium is a bargain

In Issue 711 (page 7) you mention YouTube's plan to show adverts at engaging moments, which would disrupt the flow of a video at critical segments. Adverts in general can disrupt. When I was watching *Foyle's War* on ITVX I had to endure adverts almost every 10 minutes. However, ITVX's ad-free Premium service is a bargain at £59.99 a year (www.snipca.com/55034), which is less than the cost of buying a cup of coffee every week.

Once I subscribed to ITVX Premium, *Foyle's War* episodes ran ad-free for 90 minutes, instead of the two hours it was originally broadcast in, which just shows how many adverts are crammed into an old series.

Rob Barnes

The stubble with AI: it's obsessed with beards

I read with interest Issue 711's Cover Feature comparing ChatGPT with rival AI chatbots, and was particularly interested in the images they all generated of a man drinking tea on a rollercoaster. I often use Microsoft Designer (https://designer.microsoft.com) to create birthday images for my male friends and relatives which I can post on Facebook to wish them a happy birthday.

This was fine at first. If they were into fishing, I would ask Designer to show a fisherman. If they were golfers, I would ask for a male golfer. However, this started to pall when all the male images came with beards. None of my male cousins or friends have beards so I found them totally unrepresentative.

Why does Microsoft Designer have a thing for bearded men? I noticed most of the men in your images had beards too, apart from the image created on Grok.

Lynn Sharpe

CA SAYS **It's true that AI-powered image generators are obsessed with beards. It's because they are trained on huge photo datasets stored online, and many of these – especially aspirational lifestyle photos – feature beards.**

AI doesn't understand the cultural significance of beards. It's not thinking, "This is what modern men look like," so much as "Statistically, this is what men tend to look like in pictures I've seen". This sets a pattern of images that can get repetitive very fast. If you want a specific

What's the Issue...?

I need a hard drive of at least 6TB. Didn't you test one some time last year?

Ryan Milton

CA SAYS **Yes, Western Digital's My Passport, priced £163. See Issue 692, page 25.**

I recall a Cover Feature last year that recommended the best tools for blocking online trackers. When was that?

Rick Jordan

CA SAYS **In Issue 683 – read it and the review above on our Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.**

When did you list those Roku TVs that are under £200?

David Anderton

CA SAYS **In Issue 704's 'Ditch your old TV habits' Cover Feature – page 57. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/55028.**

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look, you have to spell it out. For example, Google Gemini gave us a "bald, clean-shaven male golfer" (pictured right), though that club would struggle to fit into most bags!

Gemini won our group test of chatbots in Issue 711, beating ChatGPT, Grok and Perplexity. You can find out why we liked it by buying a back issue from www.snipca.com/55039.

Being polite to ChatGPT harms no one

With regards to Neil Spencer's outrage after hearing people saying "please" and "thank you" when talking to ChatGPT (Letters, Issue 710), this reminds me of my driving lessons many years ago. The instructor said that the 'mirror/signal/manoeuvre' action would soon become second nature and I'd soon be doing it without thinking. He was right and now, 47 years later, I still do it without a second thought even when there's no one behind me.

Saying please and thank you is like that for many people. It's how we/they speak. As it's harming no one, surely no one can object to this?

Joseph Zarb

Mozilla is wrong to close Pocket

I don't understand why Mozilla has decided to close the Pocket app for Firefox (pictured below). It has a loyal following, and I've used it since launch and have loved it. Pocket feels like part of Firefox itself. Saving items while using it could not be more simple. Mozilla says Pocket is no longer popular because how people save items from the internet has "evolved". I have to disagree. If that were true, there would be little or no need for such apps. Similar apps like Instapaper, Wallabag and Raindrop are still available. So why does Mozilla think it needs to close the app?

Marek Wesolowski

CA SAYS Marek won't be the only Pocket user frustrated by this decision. It remains useful and popular, but that wasn't enough to save it from Mozilla's new business strategy of focusing on core products like Firefox and privacy tools. The closest alternative is Instapaper (www.instapaper.com), though Raindrop.io (https://raindrop.io) is worth considering if you want more advanced features.

Pocket will close on 8 July, and you'll have until 8 October to export your saved articles. After this, all accounts will be "permanently deleted". Mozilla gives more details at www.snipca.com/55031.

STAR LETTER

I'll stick with Freeview until you can record on Freely

Question of the Fortnight

Will the BBC launch a Freely TV box?

It sees the device as essential before Freeview is switched off

Freely

THE FACTS

The BBC might be keen for everyone to switch to Freely, but I'm more than happy to stick with my Freeview box ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 711, pictured). It has one benefit that I rarely see mentioned, and that's the ability to record shows on to PVRs so you can skip through the adverts. I accept this isn't a problem on BBC channels, but ad breaks are getting so long on commercial channels that you've got time to make 50 cups of tea during them.

I may be wrong, but I don't think any Freely TVs let you record yet. Recording is such a popular feature for viewers that I can only assume leaving it off is a deliberate ploy to stop adverts being skipped. There's no technical reason why it can't be done. Streaming services can be recorded just as easily as broadcast signals, and smart TVs already have the ability to save shows.

This seems part of a wider strategy from broadcasters to make adverts so maddeningly frequent that you have to pay to avoid them. Channel 4 charges £40 a year, for example, while ITV costs a shocking £60. It's also why broadcasters hate PVRs, such as those made by Manhattan (whose models I've used for years). They want complete control over how and when you watch adverts. I hope enough people realise what's happening and stick defiantly with Freeview.

Jim Healy

CA SAYS There's no question that broadcasters are exploiting the annoyance factor of adverts to sell ad-free subscriptions. But some viewers think these are worth the money – see Rob Barnes' letter opposite.

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Claims scams are fatal attractions

One of the most absurd email scams I've ever received, about two years ago, purported to be from a 'claims' company and stated: "We are sorry to hear about your fatal accident. But good news! We have been able to secure compensation of £1.2m (less our agreed fee of 2%) for you." To accept this generous offer, all I had to do was provide my bank details, home address and mobile number. I reported it online and was advised that it would be investigated.

Just after Christmas last year, I received a similar email stating: "We were saddened to hear about your latest fatal accident and we are working hard to obtain a generous offer of compensation." I was again asked to provide bank and home details. I'm just a little concerned about how many more fatal accidents I can expect!

Tony Huby

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Why won't eBay refund me for missing *Doctor Who* cassette?

LEAD CASE

Q I've been selling my *Doctor Who* collection on eBay to raise money because I've become father to a gorgeous baby daughter. One buyer who paid me £129.99 for a very rare Betamax cassette of a *Doctor Who* story claims the box was damaged and the cassette was missing. I refunded but eBay says because I did this voluntarily it won't refund me for the missing video. Surely this cannot be legal?

Dave Woodley

A We're afraid it is because eBay is allowed to set its own rules for cases where delivery goes wrong. These rules are very rigid and favour buyers over sellers. And as Dave found out, typically it won't intervene in a case if the seller has voluntarily refunded the buyer.

Where Dave went wrong is not letting the buyer open a case for a missing item. Dave could have then disputed this and the buyer would have had to prove the video was not in the packaging.

Dave is also seeking money back from Evri, the courier firm he used to send the cassette. Evri told Dave he can only get money back from eBay, but this isn't true. Dave's contract is with Evri, so he might be able to sue the company over the failed delivery. He has proof of the item's value from the eBay sale, although Evri might dispute this. He'll have to do this within 28 days of the delivery, and needs the buyer to back him up about the parcel being tampered with and the video being missing (possibly stolen).

However unless Dave paid Evri for insurance cover, he's unlikely to get more than around £20 in compensation. Dave's been the good guy in this case, so we'll push Evri to help him. In the meantime he should file a claim with Evri for a lost or damaged parcel (www.snipca.com/55000).

CASE ONGOING

Can BT delete my billing history after I leave?

Q I've recently switched my broadband from BT to EE. BT says that one of the unforeseen consequences of the switch is that all my digital billing records have gone. BT apologised, but says the loss can't be reversed. Can it do this?

Peter Gordon

A Not quite, and BT's answer is misleading. It's true that BT deactivates online accounts 12 months after you leave, but the actual records aren't deleted because by law it has to keep customer billing data for up to six years.

When BT told Peter his data is gone it really meant it won't show it to him unless he asks the right way. He should contact the company's Data Protection team (**data.protection@bt.com**) and ask for his old bills. If that fails, he should fill in a Subject Access Request form on the Information Commissioner's Office website (www.snipca.com/55010). BT must supply these bills under the UK's data-protection laws, though it may charge a small admin fee if he asks for a lot of records.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Reader uses warranty to get faster shower fix

We're happy to say that Triton has replaced Charles Smyth's faulty shower (see Issue 711), proving that sometimes using the manufacturer's warranty gets faster results than chasing the retailer.

Charles bought the shower from B&Q and paid for it to be installed, but it didn't work properly. B&Q refused to help and claimed instead he had to approach Triton under its warranty. This advice was totally wrong. If a product is faulty then resolving the problem is always the responsibility of the retailer.

However, often the retailer's response is to contact the manufacturer for a fix. This is why sometimes it can be quicker to bypass the retailer and go straight to the manufacturer yourself.

This was particularly true in Charles' case because to get a refund from B&Q he would have had to uninstall the shower and return it. He wanted to avoid this hassle, though B&Q would have had to reimburse him for any costs incurred from uninstalling and sending it back, as well as the original installation costs.

But if you do contact the manufacturer directly, make sure you let the retailer know what you're doing. Also be clear whether you're using the Consumer Rights Act (CRA) or warranty to seek help. If you choose the latter and the repair or replacement fails, you can fall back on the CRA, which allows just one attempted repair or replacement.

Why won't Dell help me connect to printer?

Q I bought a new Dell laptop but I'm unable to connect my HP Deskjet 3050A J611 printer (pictured). The problem is that the printer's driver won't install on my laptop and despite calling Dell customer services many times, the problem's not been resolved. Now, weeks later, customer services refuse to respond despite saying the case is being investigated. Can you help?

Nizar Jafferbhoy

A We'll do our best because Nizar has already made a formal complaint to Dell, which he says is being ignored. It should be simple to pair the two devices, either by USB cable or Wi-Fi function, so it's clear that something is wrong. Nizar would like a visit from a Dell technician, but the company should first try harder to solve the problem by email or over the phone.

If Dell can't fix the problem, he's entitled to a refund, though Dell might deduct some money to reflect how long he's used it. We don't know when Nizar bought the laptop, but if less than six months have passed, the onus is on Dell to prove it isn't inherently faulty. After that it becomes Nizar's responsibility to prove there *is* a fault – and that's likely to require paying for an independent

inspection. Dell would have to refund this if a fault is found, and if it agrees with the verdict. Nizar also wants Dell to compensate him for "the frustrations and time lost", though he'd have to prove financial loss.

CASE ONGOING

Did Doro sell a phone that can't transfer files?

Q In February, I bought a Leva L10 4G phone from Doro (£80 from www.snipca.com/55008, pictured), but I can't transfer files and photos to its memory card. I should obviously be able to do this. I like the phone, so has Doro made a mistake by selling something with a function that can't be used?

Philip Burman

A Since contacting us Philip asked Doro for an instruction manual, which it has posted to him (it's also available online at www.snipca.com/55009). We hope this will explain how to transfer files to the memory card. We've asked Doro to get in touch with Philip to check he's managed to do this, and offer further assistance if needed.

If Doro had sold a phone that couldn't transfer files to a memory card despite saying it could in the listing, then it would be not as described and Doro would be guilty of using a misleading description. For the former Philip would have a case under the Consumer Rights Act, and the latter under the Unfair Trading Regulations (which in April were superseded by the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act).

Incidentally, Philip was pleased that Doro sent him a paper manual (from Sweden) and didn't ask him to download it from the web.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Acctim fixed old clock that's out of warranty

I inherited an Acctim radio-controlled clock from my mother-in-law when she passed, and it worked well for years. But then it started showing the hour hand four hours slow, and soon after the pendulum stopped working. Replacing the batteries didn't help.

I finally decided to try to get it back to telling the right time. I emailed Acctim for help, though wasn't expecting a reply because the clock was many years past its

warranty. But they responded within a few days, asking for the exact model number and a photo.

Acctim then emailed me instructions on how to fix the problem. I just had to take the batteries out and leave them for 10 minutes before putting them back in. This worked, and it now shows the correct time. I think Acctim went above and beyond as the clock is so old.

Terry Steels

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Acctim

- **Online form** https://acctim.com/contact-us
- **Phone** 01908 220020

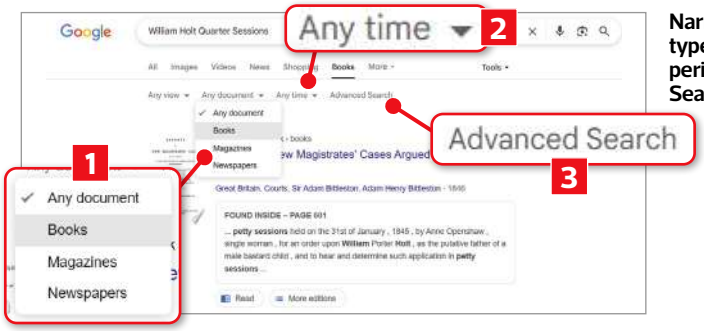
Grow Your Family Tree

Many books previously found only in libraries have been digitised and published online. **Richard Holt** explains how to...

Search for ancestors on Google Books

When I first started researching my family history several years ago, I discovered that many of my ancestors were mentioned in publications held by my local studies library. Sometime, I would uncover stories about their lives or find their names in various indexes.

Many of these publications are now online. And one of the best places to search them is Google Books, a free archive comprising millions of digitised books, magazines, newspapers and other historical records. It's a treasure trove for genealogists, no matter how far you've progressed researching your tree.



Narrow your results by type of publication and period, or go to Advanced Search

Filter your results using Advanced tools

With so many records, searching on Google Books can feel daunting. But there's no better way to start than simply visiting https://books.google.co.uk, then typing your ancestor's name and pressing Enter. The usual Google search tricks apply, so surround your search term with quote marks to look for that exact phrase.

You can narrow results by type of publication (books, magazines or newspapers – 1 in our screenshot above right) and by period (19th, 20th or 21st Century, or your own date range, by clicking the 'Any time' dropdown menu 2).

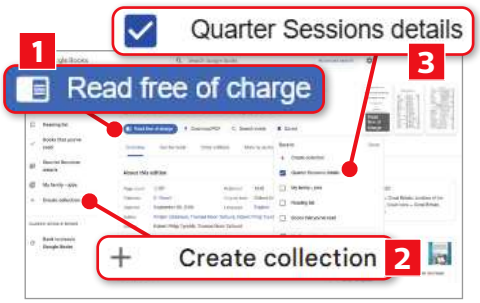
You can also use the Advanced Search option by clicking that option in the results 3, or going straight to www.snipca.com/54935. This lets you search for combinations of words, such as your ancestor's name and a birthplace, year and occupation.

What you can read on Google Books depends on copyright. If a book is out of copyright, you'll usually be able to read the whole thing in Full View (shown as 'Read free of charge', 1 in our screenshot below right), and download a PDF to keep. For books still under copyright, the amount you can see varies. Some offer a Preview, showing a selection of sample pages, while others only have a Snippet – just a few lines of text around your search terms (for details visit www.snipca.com/54934).

Add information to your collections

When you've found something you want to keep, click 'Create collection' on the left 2. Give it a name and description, and you'll see it appear in the menu on the left. From now, click the Save button under anything you want to save, then tick the collection you want to add it to 3.

One of the records on Google Books I find most useful are for Quarter Session trials, which were held in local courts four times a year from the 14th Century to the early 1970s. The best way to find these is to search for your ancestor's name in quote marks, followed by "quarter sessions" then any other relevant information, such as year or location. Other popular records in Google Books include trade directories, military rolls, parish registers and local histories.



Make your research easier by adding information to a collection

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

My research keeps hitting a brick wall because I think my grandfather changed his name by deed poll just after World War 2. At least, I think he did! I'm guessing he did this in the 1940s, but I can't be sure. Where do I go to begin this paper chase?

James Lawrie

You might be in luck, because only deed poll records from 1945 to 2003 are searchable online at the National Archives' site. However, these are only enrolled deed-poll records, which are formal name changes registered with the Royal Courts of Justice. Visit www.snipca.com/43760 then scroll down to the heading '3.3' and follow the instructions. It will explain how to search using *The Gazette*'s records, then complete a form if you find your grandfather.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Search parish clerk websites

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

IMAGE EDITOR

PhotoDemon 2025.4

www.snipca.com/55086
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

We've recommended several free image editors recently, including GIMP (in Issue 707) and Photo Variants (in Issue 709). PhotoDemon is easier to use than those programs and lighter on system resources – its developer wants it to be "the smallest, lightest photo editor money (can't) buy".

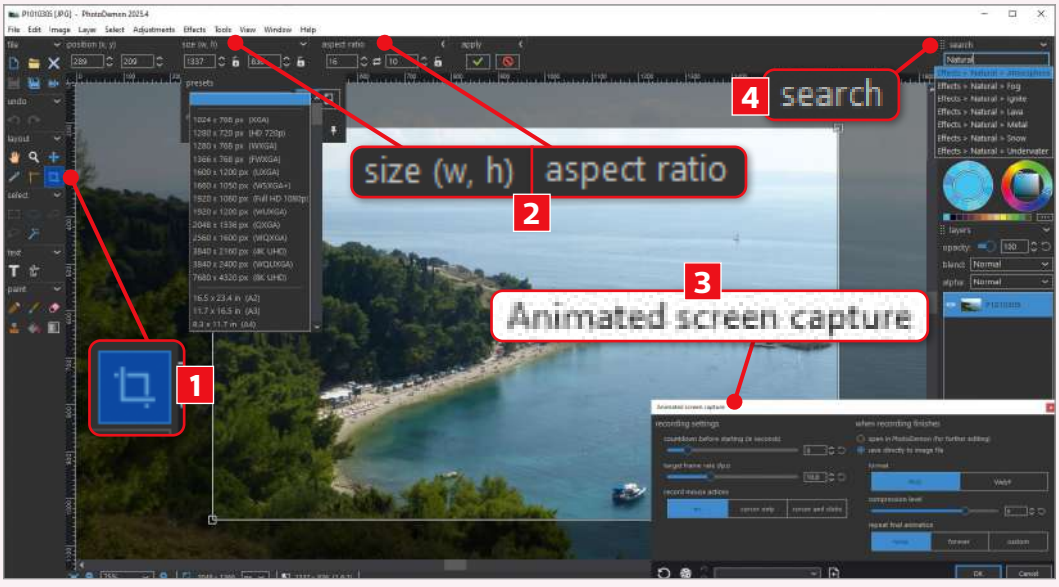
This new version introduces a memory-management feature, similar to the one in some web browsers. When you're working with lots of large photos, PhotoDemon will automatically suspend 'inactive' images (those you're not currently editing) to free up RAM. This only happens when memory is running low and ensures the software doesn't cause your system to freeze. When you switch back to an inactive image, PhotoDemon will restore the required RAM.

However, the most notable new feature in PhotoDemon 2025.4 is a new Crop tool. Previously, to crop an area of an image, you needed to first click a Selection tool in the toolbar, such as Rectangular, Elliptical or Magic Wand. The new tool is 'on-canvas', which means you can simply drag your cursor over the area to crop, as in many other image editors.

PhotoDemon's Options box, which you access via the Tools menu, has been redesigned so that it's faster to load and easier to navigate. Options are now organised into logical categories, such as Performance, Saving and 'Color management'. There's also a Fonts category, which lets you change the default font of PhotoDemon's interface – including to Comic Sans.

Another useful addition repairs images with incorrect file extensions, which sometimes happens with pictures you download from the web. If PhotoDemon detects, for example, a WEBP image with a PNG extension, it will offer to fix it so you can open the file in other programs as well.

Finally, if you don't like the splash screen that briefly appears when you launch PhotoDemon, you can now turn it off. Click 'Loading' in the Options box and untick 'display splash screen'.



1 The new on-canvas crop tool in PhotoDemon makes it much easier to select an area of an image to crop. Just ensure the Crop tool is active in the left-hand toolbar (it is by default). Press 'C' to activate it without clicking.

2 To crop the selected area of an image to a particular size or aspect ratio, click either of those labels in the top toolbar and select an option from the Presets dropdown menu. Click the green tick button on the toolbar to carry out the crop.

3 One of PhotoDemon's cleverest features lets you capture animated screenshots, which are like GIFs but higher quality. Click the Tools menu and select 'Animated screen capture, to record an area of your screen.

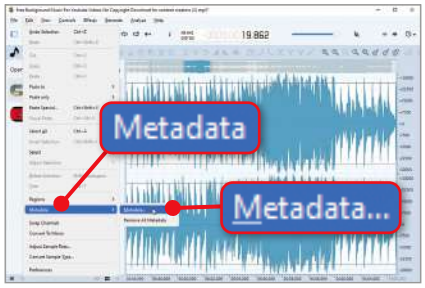
4 To find a particular tool in PhotoDemon, start typing its name into the search box in the top-right corner. This will tell you which menus and sub-menus contain matching keywords. Select a result to open the relevant tool directly.

AUDIO EDITOR

Ocenaudio 3.15

www.ocenaudio.com

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



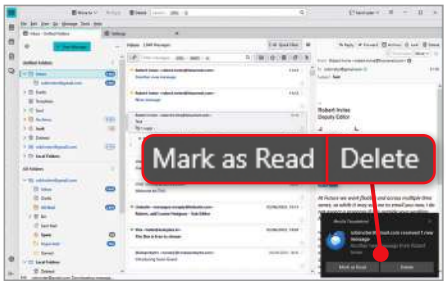
Ocenaudio is a simpler alternative to Audacity (www.snipca.com/55077) for editing your audio files. This update expands the number of supported audio formats, so it can potentially open obscure files other programs can't. It now lets you edit the metadata of multiple files at once, which is useful if they came from the same source. Press Ctrl+A to select all the items in the Opened Files panel, then click the Edit menu and choose Metadata twice (see screenshot). You can edit information such as the artist, album, year and artwork. The program's Sound Preferences and Add New Audio boxes have been redesigned, and a new option lets you edit the last effect you applied to an audio track. Ocenaudio triggers a SmartScreen warning when installing, but it's safe to use so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

EMAIL CLIENT

Thunderbird 139

www.snipca.com/55080

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



With Microsoft's new Outlook app for Windows proving controversial, now is the perfect time to switch to Thunderbird. Mozilla's email client is fast, simple to use and free, and lets you easily manage multiple accounts. The latest version fixes dozens of bugs and makes several improvements to the interface. You can now manually sort folders in the Folders pane, so more important ones appear first. Simply drag and drop a folder into the desired position. Another new option lets you choose how many rows of a message are displayed in your inbox in Cards view (which shows responses in email discussion threads). Go to Settings, then Appearance and select either two or three rows. Best of all, when Thunderbird shows a new-message notification, you can now delete an unimportant email or mark it as read without opening it (see screenshot).

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Fences 6

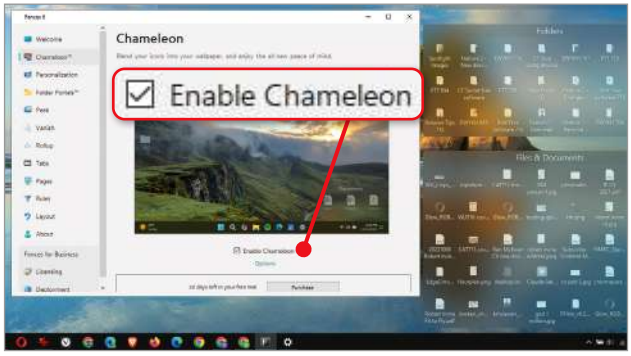
www.snipca.com/55084

Price: £9.99 per year **Free trial period:** 30 days

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

If your desktop is cluttered with icons for files, folders and program shortcuts, Fences will help you keep it tidy. It works by arranging your desktop icons into themed groups called 'fences', which makes them easier to find than when they're in one random sprawl.

The default options are Programs, Folders and 'Files & Documents', but you can rename these and create your own fences by drawing rectangles on your desktop. The program lets you customise your fences to look and work exactly the way you want, including changing their background colour and opacity level, and rolling them up when not in use to free up screen space. We particularly like the Chameleon option, which fades all icons while keeping them visible (see screenshot), and Quick-hide, which hides (and reveals) everything on your desktop when you double-click a blank area.



Fences 6 updates the Folder Portals feature, which turns folders into fences so you can access their contents with a single click. Moving Folder Portals on top of each other creates a tabbed view, and you can now copy files to a tab by dragging and dropping.

Another useful option takes daily snapshots of your desktop layout, so you can restore it if someone moves things around. You can also set up rules to automatically place items in specific fences based on their name, type or creation date.

OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

Fences is a brilliant way to clean up your desktop, with lots of customisation options. The closest free alternative is Portals (www.snipca.com/55083), but Fences has loads more features, a smarter design and is easier to use.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

Which app can convert speech into on-screen text?

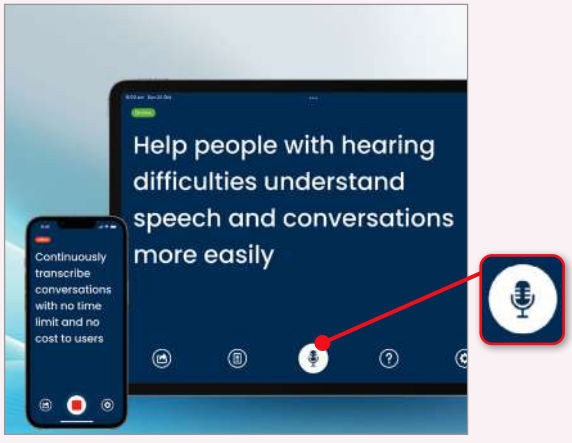
Q I was adopted as a baby many years ago and have recently made contact with my birth family. My genetic cousin is now very elderly and nearly totally deaf, but does read well and I'm going to visit him this summer. In order to communicate with him, I'd like to use an app on my iPad mini that converts everything I say to on-screen text he can read. Any ideas?

David Norfolk

A We'd recommend using NALscribe, which is free from the iOS App Store at www.snipca.com/54969, and works on iPhones and iPads. Although it's made by Australia's National Acoustics Laboratories, it worked perfectly fine with our British accent.

Once installed, tap the microphone icon (see screenshot) at the bottom of the screen and start talking. NALscribe listens and after a couple of seconds starts writing what you've said. The text is large enough to read easily, and you can change the size of the captions by tapping the cog at the bottom of the screen and using the slider. If you're having trouble with recognition, make sure the correct language is selected on this screen. As well as 'English (UK)', which is automatically selected, you'll find American, Australian and Canadian English, alongside 12 non-English options.

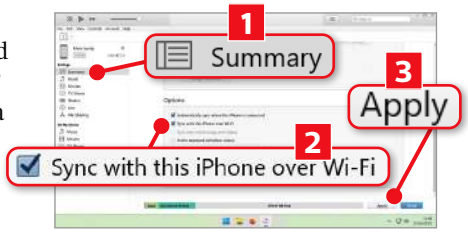
Older sections of text scroll off the screen as you continue to speak. You can control this by setting NALscribe to automatically clear the screen entirely if you pause for either 20 or 60 seconds.


Help people with hearing difficulties understand speech and conversations more easily
Continuously transcribe conversations with no time limit and no cost to users

How do I move music from Windows to iPhone?

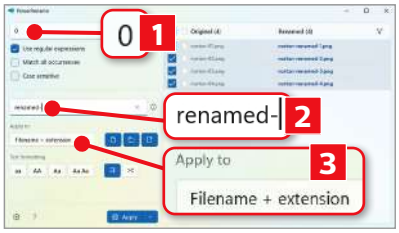
Q I want to move 500 music files from my Windows laptop to my iPhone. I managed to do it in one go on Android, but it doesn't seem possible on an iPhone. I don't have iTunes.

Michael Parker



A Have you tried using iTunes? If not, give it a go, because it's built precisely for this task. Download it for free from www.snipca.com/54967 then connect your phone to your PC. Now click the phone icon to the right of the 'Music' menu in the top bar. Choose between syncing your entire music library or just selected playlists, artists, albums or genres, then click Sync. Once you've set up synchronisation via USB, extend it to sync wirelessly by clicking Summary (1 in our screenshot), selecting 'Sync with this iPhone over Wi-Fi' 2, then clicking Apply 3.

How can I rename multiple photo files?



Q I used to have a program that renamed multiple photo files, but I've lost it. I've looked for a replacement, but most don't let you choose the output file name or are too complex. Can you help?

Bob Stewart

A Use the PowerRename tool, which is part of Windows PowerToys (free from www.snipca.com/54968). Install it, then make sure the slider beside PowerRename is switched on (to the right) on the PowerToys home screen. Now, when you want to rename several files at once, select them in File Explorer and right-click. Click 'Rename with PowerRename' then use the search box at the top of the sidebar to enter the pattern that it needs to find (1 in our screenshot). Now type your replacement in the second box 2. In the 'Apply to' menu select whether you want to work with just the file name or extension, or both 3, then click Apply.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

VPNSecure cancels ‘lifetime’ subscriptions

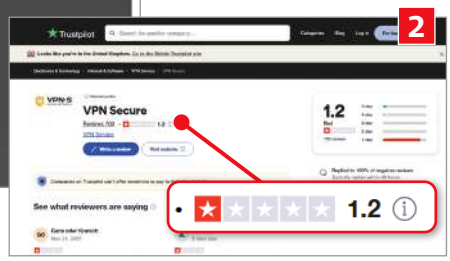
If you signed up to VPNSecure (www.vpnsecure.me) before 2023 you may have been tempted by its lifetime subscription. It was decent value – a one-off purchase costing up to $40 (around £31). But in 2023 the owners Boost Network Pty Ltd sold VPNSecure to InfiniteQuant Ltd, and they have now cancelled all lifetime subscriptions.

Unsurprisingly, this has led to a huge backlash, with customers discussing potential legal action on Reddit (www.snipca.com/55047, see screenshot 1) and a wave of one-star reviews on Trustpilot (www.snipca.com/55049 2).

InfiniteQuant’s argument is that they bought VPNSecure’s “technology, domain, and customer database”, but not the “liabilities”. In other words, it bought everything it could make money from, but nothing that lost money. Furthermore, it claims it only learned about the lifetime subscriptions many months after the deal. If this isn’t total baloney then its legal team needs firing.

r/vpns
luckyuglydawg
VPN Secure deactivated all Lifetime Deal accounts
VPN Secure deactivated all Lifetime Deal accounts

1 News spread on Reddit that VPNSecure had “deactivated” lifetime subscriptions



2 Customers responded angrily by giving the company an average rating of just 1.2 stars

It’s not unusual nor illegal for companies to axe lifetime deals. They often argue it means the life of a device or service, not the life of the customer. Angry customers could launch a collective lawsuit, but the legal definition of ‘lifetime’ is so loose I doubt it would succeed.

However, I also doubt whether VPNSecure can survive the damage done to its name. There are so many dodgy VPNs that trust is paramount. There’s a reason why leading VPNs no longer offer lifetime deals: they’d rather not have a reputation-shredding reaction when they inevitably have to cancel them. InfiniteQuant are about to learn this the hard way.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

ASUS

WHAT THEY SAY

ASUS www.snipca.com/55044

“Building upon its ‘Ubiquitous AI. Incredible Possibilities’ strategy, ASUS showcased a comprehensive ecosystem of AI solutions that extends beyond the PC, empowering users across diverse segments. This ecosystem is supported by robust AI Infrastructure, encompassing scalable cloud and powerful on-premise solutions that seamlessly integrate hardware, software, and services, supporting the development and deployment of AI for various enterprise AI workloads.”

WHAT THEY MEAN

AI might be ubiquitous, but so is our use of self-important jargon.

KEUMARS’ VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Tonny Iheoma Ezeh

Be very suspicious if anyone ever asks you to carry a bag of Elvan Chocolate Truffles from Mexico to Hong Kong, via the UK. That’s how Nigerian drug lord Tonny Iheoma Ezeh planned to smuggle crystal meth past custom officials.

He targeted pensioners in email scams that claimed they were entitled to millions of pounds if they travelled to Mexico and delivered the package. He gave the chocolates to two innocent German men, aged 67 and 80, who were stunned when they were arrested at Heathrow airport. Both were carrying three kilograms of drugs.

Police soon realised they’d been scammed by Ezeh, and they arrested him last December when he flew into the UK. In May, he pleaded guilty to smuggling class A drugs and was sentenced to nine years and three months behind bars. We doubt he’ll get his hands on many truffles any time soon.

ALL-IN-ONE PC | **£1,023** from Ebuyer www.snipca.com/54948

MSI Pro AP242P 14M

Stands and delivers

Buying an all-in-one PC like this one from Taiwanese company MSI is a bit like buying a mini PC with a monitor that's permanently attached to it. Getting everything together in the same case is a significant convenience, but the downside is that you're stuck with that monitor for the life of the PC.

> "A portable and powerful all-in-one that makes light work of Windows tasks"

This means the quality of the monitor is all important. The AP242P has an IPS screen with a 1920x1080-pixel resolution. We measured the peak brightness at 280cd/m², which is fine for indoor use, while its colour accuracy is certainly good enough for general Windows work, recreating 92.7 per cent of the sRGB standard and 65.6 per cent of DCI-P3.

Its refresh rate is generous at 100Hz rather than the usual 60Hz, so scrolling through web pages and documents feels that little bit smoother. It's fine for office work, browsing the web, streaming movies and shows, and simple image- and video-editing tasks, as long as getting the colours spot on isn't a priority.

The PC element is powered by a nippy Intel Core i7-14700 processor, and comes with 16GB of RAM and a 512GB SSD. This combination performed well in our tests, running Windows 11 at a fast clip and compared well with other all-in-one PCs we've tested recently, such as the Dell OptiPlex All-in-One 7420 (£742 from www.snipca.com/54213, reviewed in Issue 707). That sounds significantly cheaper, but the AP242P has a faster processor, more RAM and more storage.

At first glance, the AP242P looks like a regular black monitor, with the PC element tucked neatly away behind the screen. If you discount the stand it's still only 40mm thick at its deepest, and at just over 6kg it's easy to lug around your home. The bezels above and to the sides of the screen are slender at 8mm, and while the bottom edge is much deeper at 18mm, it's hardly an eyesore.

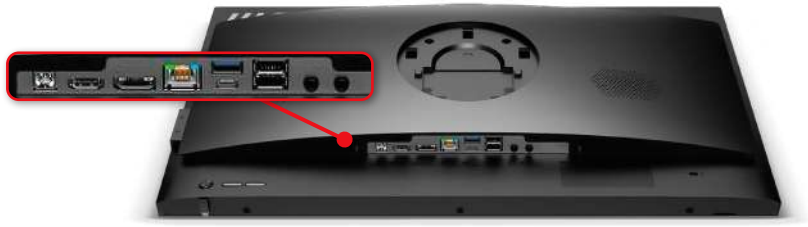
Unusually for an all-in-one it's possible to remove the rear panel and access the memory and storage, so these can be easily upgraded at a later date. It's also worth noting that the unit doesn't come with a keyboard and mouse, so if you don't have any lying around you'll need to factor these into your budget.

There's a generous selection of ports, with two USB 3.2 on the side, while on the rear there's a USB-C, a third USB 3.2 and two USB 2.0 ports. There's also a Gigabit Ethernet socket, one HDMI port and two audio jacks for a mic and speakers (pictured below left).

Wireless networking is catered for with Wi-Fi 6E and Bluetooth 5.3. Sitting above the screen is a 1080p webcam, and it's surprisingly good – delivering crisp and colourful images even in poorer lighting conditions.

SPECIFICATIONS

Twenty-core Intel Core i7-14700 processor • 24in 1920x1080-pixel 100Hz IPS screen • 16GB RAM • Intel UHD Graphics 770 • 512GB SSD • 2x 3W speakers • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • 1080p webcam • 1x HDMI port • 1x USB-C port • 4x USB 3.2 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • Windows 11 Pro • 500x542x333mm (HxWxD) • 5.9kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54948



VERDICT A powerful all-in-one PC that's great for general Windows work and has an impressive 1080p screen, plenty of ports and a decent webcam

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Dell OptiPlex All-in-One 7420 £742 Cheaper but doesn't offer the same power

LAPTOP | **£999** from Dell www.snipca.com/54973

Dell 14 Plus Laptop

Booby price

Dell's latest 14in laptop is a compact device designed to be easy to carry around and use anywhere. It's an update of the Dell Inspiron 14 Plus (£592 from www.snipca.com/54634, reviewed in Issue 683).

While both laptops look almost identical, the 14 Plus has a slightly different set of connections. The left edge now has two USB-C and one HDMI port, while there's a single USB 3.2 port and a headphone jack on the right (all pictured below). That means the standard USB-A port has been replaced by USB-C, but it also means the Inspiron's microSD card slot has gone.

> "Perfectly fine for basic tasks but struggles to justify its price"

Inside the components have undergone an overhaul. The 14 Plus comes with an Intel Core Ultra 7 256V processor, which is newer and more powerful than the Inspiron's Ultra 7 155H chip. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it performed better in most of our tests. Both have the same amount of RAM (16GB) and size of SSD (512GB).

However, if your requirements are modest – office work, video streaming and web browsing, for example – the 14 Plus is perfectly fine. However, at 13 hours, 24 minutes when browsing the web, it lasted 90 minutes less than its predecessor.

The screen was probably the weakest element of the Inspiron, and while it's been upgraded slightly here with a bigger resolution (2560x1600 pixels, up from 2240x1400), it's still limited to IPS technology and its peak brightness level has dropped to 300cd/m² (from 367). That's fine when you're working indoors, but if you want a laptop to use outside, this isn't it.

The webcam produces a clear 1080p resolution with a frame rate of 30 fps, and has a physical privacy shutter, which we always welcome. The keys sometimes feel stiffer than they should and the trackpad isn't the smoothest.

While this is a decent laptop, it isn't enough of a leap forward to justify the price tag, especially while its predecessor is still available for £400 less. If you can afford it, we think it's worth spending a bit more on our current favourite laptop, the Acer Vivobook 16 Flip (£1,300 from www.snipca.com/54366, see page 30), which has a larger, brighter screen and increases the amount of RAM and storage.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Intel Core Ultra 7 256V processor • 16GB RAM • Intel Arc graphics • 14in 2560x1600-pixel 60Hz IPS touchscreen • 512GB SSD • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.2 port • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth • Windows 11 Home • 17x314x226mm (HxWxD) • 1.55kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54973

LEFT EDGE

RIGHT EDGE

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT Dell's latest is a decent 14in laptop, but fails to offer the superb value for money of its predecessor

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Asus Vivobook 16 Flip £1,300
A bigger, brighter screen with more RAM and storage, but significantly more expensive

MONITOR | **£100** from Laptops Direct www.snipca.com/54989

Acer Vero B247Y

Black to basics

While several hundred pounds could buy you a huge, eye-catching OLED screen with a high resolution, not everyone wants to spend that much money on a monitor. For those with budgets nearer the £100 mark, expectations have to be lowered, though you can still find a surprisingly decent screen for the price. The 24in Acer Vero B247Y is a good example.

> "A no-frills, budget monitor with a good choice of connections, but it's not for gamers or creative types"

It comes with everything you need to get it up and running, including cables for every port, a power lead and a stand. We particularly liked the latter, which provides enough headroom for the monitor to rotate into portrait mode (as pictured top right). If you regularly read long documents or scroll through detailed web pages, this is a handy option. And at less than 6kg the whole thing is relatively light, so it's easy to move around your home. The black plastic frame looks cheap, but it hides this quite nicely with its matt finish.

The screen has a Full HD resolution (1920x1080 pixels), though its relatively slow response time (4ms) means it isn't the best monitor for fast-moving games and movie scenes and wouldn't be of much use for graphic design or professional-level creative work. On the other hand, it's perfectly adequate for documents, email, browsing the web, Excel sheets, and so on. The refresh rate (75Hz) is decent enough and should keep everything looking smooth.

Brightness levels, which peak at 250cd/m², are a disappointment, however. That'll be fine if you're in a room that's shielded from direct sunlight, but won't make things easy to see if it's located next to a window or under spotlights that produce reflections.

There's a wide choice of connection options for your PC. The Vero has a DisplayPort and HDMI socket, so most modern PCs are covered. There's also a VGA port, in case you need to connect an older machine.

The built-in speakers are relatively low powered at just 2W each. They'll suffice for the various pings and chimes of Windows notifications, but when we used them during a video call the person on the other end sounded terrible. Music and video playback don't fare any better – you're better off using some decent headphones or external speakers.

In essence, you're getting what you pay for with this monitor. While the price is very appealing, you forego many of the features you'd find on pricier models. In fact, if your budget stretches that far, we'd recommend spending another £50 on the BenQ GW2486TC (£150 from www.snipca.com/54042, reviewed in Issue 706).

It's the same size and resolution, and offers similar brightness levels, but it adds a useful USB-C port. It also offers a wider range of adjustment options, which ensure the picture looks just right and you don't suffer from eye strain.

Alternatively, for a little more our current favourite monitor, the Philips 27E1N1600AE (£200 from www.snipca.com/54190, reviewed in Issue 692), gets you a larger 27in screen with a higher resolution of 2560x1440 pixels.

However, if your needs are modest and you're happy with fairly basic features, the Acer Vero B247Y is a very capable 24in monitor that will serve you well.

SPECIFICATIONS

23.8in IPS screen • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 16:9 aspect ratio • 75Hz refresh rate • 4ms response time • 1x DisplayPort • 1x HDMI port • 1x VGA port • 499x540x193mm (HxWxD) • 5.59kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/54989

VERDICT Great value for money if your budget is tight and needs are modest, but superior features are available if you spend just a bit more

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Philips 27E1N1600AE £200 A brilliant 27in monitor with a higher resolution but it does cost twice as much

ROUTER | **£120** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55035

Netgear Nighthawk RS100

Connect for less

This is the latest in a series of Wi-Fi 7 routers from Netgear, following the Nighthawk RS300 (£238 from www.snipca.com/51974, reviewed in Issue 693), then the Nighthawk RS200 (£160 from www.snipca.com/52867, reviewed in Issue 699). The RS100 is the company's cheapest yet.

> "Netgear has cherry-picked features to make this a powerful router for a reasonable price"

As you might expect given the price, the specifications are pared-back compared with the other two units. Netgear has stuck with a dual-band system that uses 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands, but not the 6GHz band that only Wi-Fi 7 devices can use. That's fine for backward-compatibility but prevents connected Wi-Fi 7 devices having their own dedicated bandwidth. It also won't let you take advantage of some of Wi-Fi 7's more advanced tools, such as the ability to link two bands into a faster, more resilient network.

However, by cherry-picking those Wi-Fi 7 features that make the biggest difference to most devices, Netgear has still created a powerful device for a very reasonable price.

In our tests it was slower than the RS300 and RS200, but beat Asus's similarly priced Wi-Fi 6 router, the RT-AX59U (£120 from www.snipca.com/45619, reviewed in Issue 656). Transferring files across the Wi-Fi network of our test house saw an average download speed of 57MB/s, which is more than enough for streaming TV and making video calls, and means that any bottleneck in your system is likely to be from your broadband speed rather than the RS100.

Another cost saving has been made with the Ethernet ports. There are five available, but only the incoming port that connects to your broadband works at 2.5Gbps speed. The other four – which send and receive data from other devices on your network – are limited to 1Gbps, which you might notice if you have a NAS drive or something similar connected and regularly send large files to and from other network devices.

While Netgear's app makes it easy to configure, some of the more advanced features you get with pricier routers are missing. Omissions include a VPN tool and parental controls. You can still subscribe to Armor, Netgear's internet security tool, but that costs a relatively steep £85 a year. If security tools are a priority, you're better off with a pricier router that includes them.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band 2.4GHz/5GHz Wi-Fi 7 • 1x 2.5Gigabit WAN port • 4x Gigabit Ethernet ports • 184x66x122mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/55035

VERDICT A budget Wi-Fi 7 router that strips back some advanced features, but is faster than most Wi-Fi 6 routers at a similar price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Netgear Nighthawk RS300 £237
More expensive, but it comes with a 6GHz band – useful if you have a lot of Wi-Fi 7 devices

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

LED printers

What do they do?

Most of us are familiar with laser printers. LED printers are very similar, in that they use light to create an image of the page to be printed on a photoreceptive drum, which is then transferred to paper using toner. However, while laser printers use a single laser that's guided across the drum with a moving mirror to create the image, an LED printer uses a strip of tiny LEDs. An LED printer is typically smaller, uses less power and is less prone to mechanical failure.

How do they work?

The light-sensitive drum starts off positively charged, but shining a light on to its surface changes the charge to negative. The toner is then positively charged and attracted to the negatively charged sections of the drum. Paper is then also charged and – as it passes over the drum – toner is released on to the paper. It's then fused with the surface of the paper by applying heat and pressure, creating a sharply detailed and durable print.

What are the specs?

LED printers are usually labelled as such, but they look very similar to laser printers from the outside so you need to check the specifications to see which technology you're getting. LED printing was invented by Japanese firm Oki in the late 1980s, but it has taken time to get the resolution up to laser printer standards. However, they're now good enough to be used in offices and homes. Brother has the best selection of home office models, including the colour HL-L3220CW (£168 from www.snipca.com/55040, pictured).

Can I change it later?

No. If you wanted to move to laser or inkjet technology, you'd have to buy a new printer.

SECURITY CAMERA | **£70** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55018

Ring Outdoor Camera Plus (Battery)

Safe space

The Outdoor Camera Plus (Battery) is the latest in a long line of Ring security cameras designed to be easy to install. It can be positioned indoors or outside, and doesn't require wiring thanks to its rechargeable battery. The camera is a little smaller than a soft drink can, so it's not obtrusive, but you'll definitely notice it's there, which is the point if you want to deter burglars.

> "Produces crisp footage and is easy to set up and use"

Before setting up, you need to charge the battery. It has a micro USB port and comes with a cable that plugs into any standard USB charger. The battery should last you a few months, as long as you're not pointing the camera at a busy street where motion detection will be triggered often. And it's easy to remove for charging. The rest of the setup process is handled via the Ring app and is straightforward, taking just a few minutes.

During testing we were impressed with the 2560x1440-pixel resolution video quality. Captured footage was clear and sharp both at night and during the day, with the wide 160-degree field of view providing impressive coverage. The weather was mostly dry while we were testing but it survived the few rain showers it encountered without problems.

All the standard features you might expect are present, including two-way audio for speaking to visitors and a siren for warding off unwanted guests. You can set up motion zones to limit those areas within the camera's viewing range that trigger alerts. The Ring app that's used to control this and other settings is comprehensive and easy to use.

The package includes a 30-day trial of Ring Home, so you can try the extra features that come with the subscription, such as 180 days of video-alert history, person alerts that distinguish between strangers and family members, and device modes linked to your location, so the camera is automatically turned on when you leave the house.

After the free trial, it costs from £4.99 a month. Without the subscription you still get alerts to your phone – prompting you to watch live – but the footage isn't stored. With the subscription it's saved for 30 days.

SPECIFICATIONS
2K 2560x1440-pixel resolution • 160-degree field of view • Colour night vision • Two-way audio • 128x67x67mm (HxWxD including stand) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55018

VERDICT A cheap and versatile security camera, but to get the most out of it you'll need to pay a subscription

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Tapo TC65 2K Security Camera £30 A cheaper 1080p outdoor camera that doesn't require a monthly subscription

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Is there a keyboard that can cope with my typing style?

Q As a typist from the days of typewriters, I despair because my laptop's keyboard can't seem to cope with me bashing the keys. Sometimes it works but sometimes it doesn't and I don't have the desk space to use a separate keyboard with it. Can you suggest a laptop with a keyboard that will withstand my aggressive typing?

Susan Ride

A Getting a separate keyboard that suits your style is your best bet, as we can't think of a laptop with the kind of robust keyboard you'd need. We'd suggest a tablet PC instead, which is effectively just a screen, and a high-quality wireless mechanical keyboard. The keyboard would sit in front of the screen and wouldn't take up any more space than a regular laptop. If it breaks, you can also simply replace it.

A good option is the new Windows Surface Pro (£799 from www.snipca.com/55016, pictured). This is a Copilot+ PC that's great for running Windows and office software and for web browsing.

There are plenty of wireless mechanical keyboards from reputable manufacturers such as Logitech or Cherry to choose from, but we like the look of the Razer Pro Type Ultra (£160 from www.snipca.com/55017).

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POWER BANK | **£33** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54995

INIU P51L

Carrying charge

This power bank from Chinese firm INIU has a large capacity and fast power output for a very reasonable price. It can charge small and medium-sized devices like phones and tablets in no time.

Its sleek build and rounded edges make it pleasant to hold and easy to slip into your pocket. But the best thing about the design is its built-in USB-C cable, which is used to connect to the device you want to charge or plugged into the mains (via a USB-C adapter) when the bank itself needs recharging. It also has a USB-C and USB-A port, but you'll need your own cables to use these.

SPECIFICATIONS

20,000mAh capacity • 22.5W of power • 1x integrated USB-C cable • 1x USB-C port • 1x regular USB port • 115x73x29mm • 326g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54995

The bank has a maximum output of 22.5W, which is enough for fast-charging phones and other small devices, while three-way simultaneous charging is also possible.

During testing the P51L managed to charge our Google Pixel 7a phone, which has a 4,385mAh battery, from empty to full in just over 90 minutes, which is impressively quick. In the process, the bank's battery dipped by 27 per cent, so it should be possible to get three or four full charges out of it before it needs to be recharged itself.

By plugging the built-in cable into a storage slot on the side it becomes a carrying loop. Despite the cable being relatively thin and wobbling around a little in the slot, it stayed put throughout our testing.

VERDICT A capable and affordable power bank with a handy integrated USB-C cable

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Anker Laptop Power Bank £70 A similar design but this is more powerful and can be used to charge laptops

COOLING PAD | **£130** from Amazon www.snipca.com/54996

Llano RGB Laptop Cooling Pad

Chilling effect

The RGB Laptop Cooling Pad from Chinese manufacturer Llano is built around a huge 140mm fan, capable of a dizzying 2,800rpm, which draws heat away from an overworked laptop. It's expensive, but if your laptop tends to overheat when playing games or working with demanding software, it may be just what you need.

The design is tastefully done, with no sharp angles of the type often seen on gaming accessories, and the RGB lighting is restricted to a single, modest bar around the cooling pad's edge.

We ran a 3DMark Stress Test using an Acer Predator Helios 300 gaming laptop. Before the test, its temperature was 28°C. After running our stress test for 15 minutes with the cooling pad operating at its maximum, the temperature had risen to 36°C – a rise of just eight degrees.

By comparison, without any cooling the temperature increased by 32 degrees. When we used a cheaper pad – the Liangstar Laptop Cooling Pad (£20 from www.snipca.com/54389, reviewed in Issue 708) – the temperature rose by 15 degrees. In other words, the Llano cooling pad is impressively effective.

The downside is that its fan makes more noise. We used a meter from a few inches away to gauge noise levels, and it measured 79decibels (dB). Liangstar's pad, by comparison, only produced 59dB.

You only really need this sort of device if your laptop struggles to stay cool, but it could also keep an older laptop going for longer. You could also avoid having to buy a more powerful machine.

SPECIFICATIONS

1x 140mm fan • 2,800rpm spin rate • • 3x USB ports • 69x429x328mm (HxWxD) • 1.8kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/54996

VERDICT The most effective cooling pad we've ever tested, but it's also the most expensive and it's louder than cheaper rivals

★★★★★

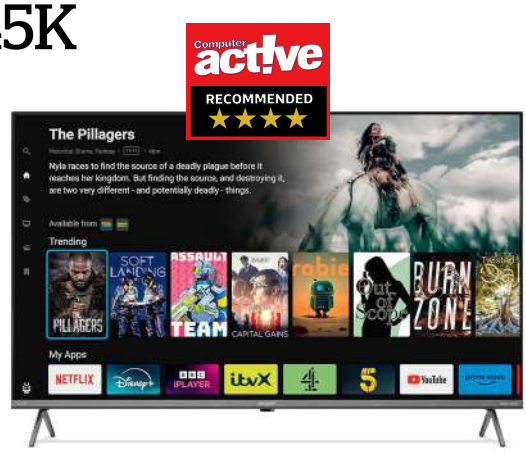
ALTERNATIVE

Liangstar Laptop Cooling Pad £20 A cheaper option that may be all you need if your laptop doesn't get seriously hot

SMART TV | **£279** from Amazon www.snipca.com/55066

Sharp GM6245K

Set the standard



This isn't the cheapest 43in smart TV we've tested (that honour goes to the Bush 43UT24SB, £179 from www.snipca.com/53637, reviewed in Issue 703), but it has a lot going for it that makes it worth the extra money.

> "An easy-to-use interface with built-in services, sharp picture and great audio"

One plus point is the quality of the screen. During testing we were impressed with its contrast, which was higher than on many models in this price range. The bars at the top and bottom of widescreen movies were still dark grey, rather than the absolute black you get on a more expensive QLED TV, but they still look surprisingly deep.

The images themselves are incredibly sharp with 4K content looking particularly detailed. This is helped by a level of tone definition in brighter scenes that budget TVs rarely achieve. Colours aren't the most vibrant we've seen, but the TV handles subtle tones well, with skin colours, for example, looking natural and nuanced.

The set comes with both TiVo for paid-for streaming options and Freely for free live channels and catch-up services. Freely is the long-term replacement for Freesat and Freeview. It doesn't have all the channels you'll find on those services, but most BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and 5 shows are there. For a full list visit www.snipca.com/55085.

TiVo's interface is surprisingly easy to use and brings instant access to most of the usual big-name streamers, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ and YouTube. That said, it doesn't provide direct access to Apple TV+, Discovery+ or Paramount+, though you can get these through the Prime Video app.

Overall, however, TiVo makes it very easy to find content from across all the services it does carry, and you can use voice commands, so you don't have to scroll through menus or fiddle around with on-screen keyboards.

With three HDMI and two USB ports, there's plenty of scope for plugging in other devices. The most pleasant surprise, however, is the two built-in Harman Kardon speakers, which produce the highest-quality audio we've ever heard on a TV at this price.

SPECIFICATIONS

43in QLED IPS screen • 4K resolution • Supports HDR10, HLG, Dolby Vision • 3x HDMI ports • 2x USB ports • 1x Ethernet port • 619x860x230mm (HxWxD, including feet) • 7.4kg (including feet) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/55066

VERDICT High sound and picture quality for the price, and instant access to most streaming services via an easy-to-use interface

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Bush 43UT24SB £179 Lacks the picture and audio quality, but still great value for money

DO I REALLY NEED...

A folding laptop-tablet?

What is it?

Chinese manufacturer Huawei has launched the MateBook Fold (pictured), an 18in tablet with an OLED screen that can fold down the middle to be used as a laptop.

What does it do?

In one mode it's a large 18in tablet, with a 3296x2472-pixel resolution. Bend this in the middle (each half then has a resolution of 2472x1648 pixels) and the bottom half of the screen can become an onscreen keyboard. Alternatively, connect a wireless keyboard and use the bottom section as screen space.

What's the catch?

Huawei has only launched it in China and hasn't announced plans to sell it elsewhere. It also doesn't run Windows, but uses Huawei's own operating system HarmonyOS 5 instead.

So can I do without it?

You'll have to for now, though you might be less upset when we tell you it's selling for around £2,500.

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A great-value mini PC with a powerful AMD processor

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Windows 11 tablet designed to take on iPads

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

PRICE DROP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£749 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683

This is back as our favourite as its replacement, Asus's Vivobook 16 Flip, seems to have sold out. It remains an excellent laptop, with a fast processor, 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Also recently discounted to £749.

ALTERNATIVE PCSpecialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £1027 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £675 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711

With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

Honor MagicPad2
£400 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £799 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £499 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Samsung Galaxy A56
£499 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £279 from www.snipca.com/53388

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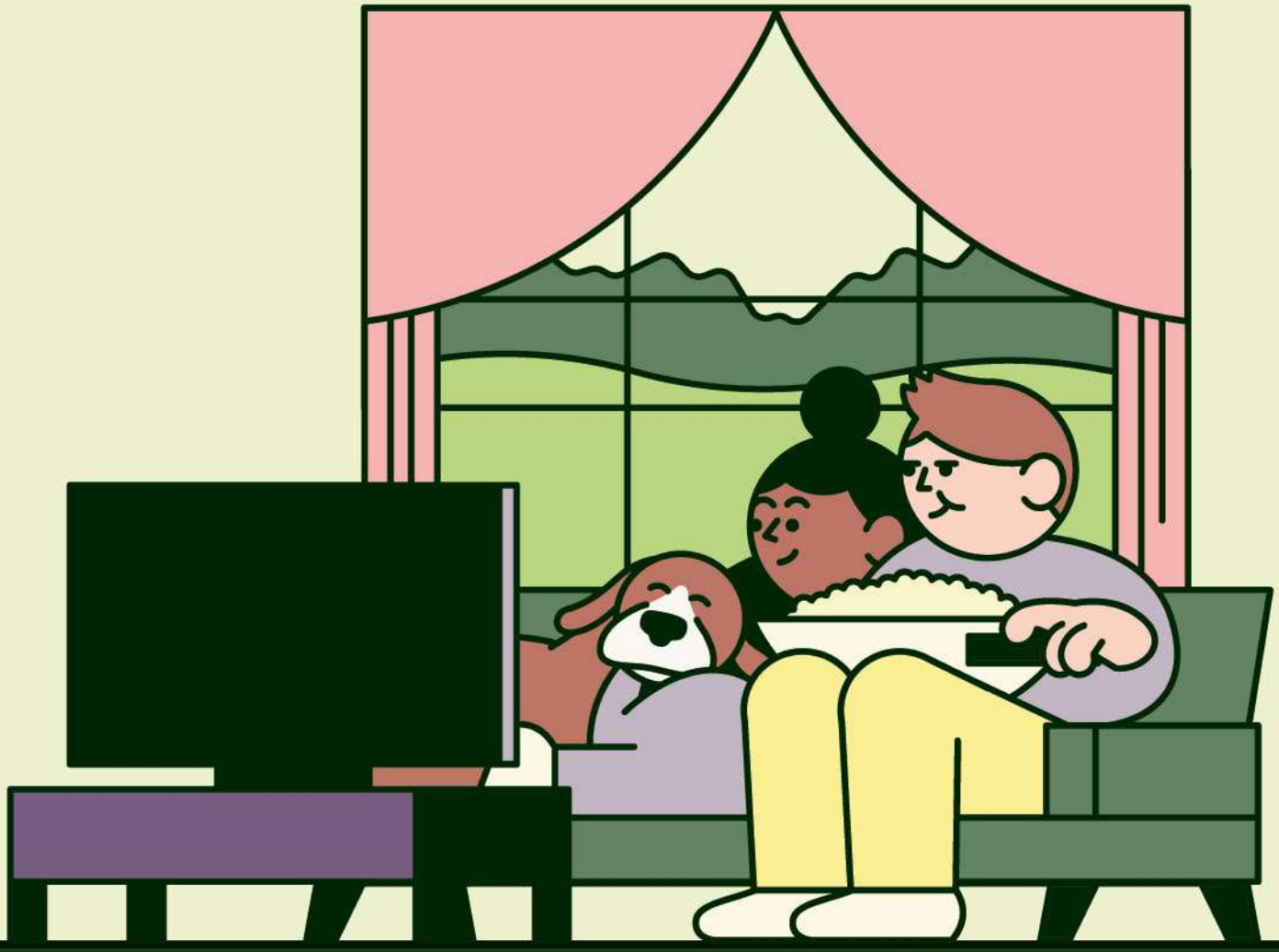

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £719 from www.snipca.com/51157

EBOOK READER

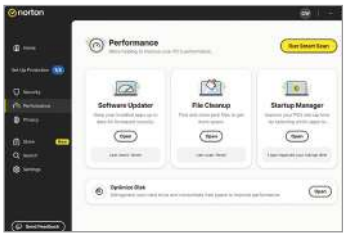
Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/54797
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, two-year licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

NEW ENTRY

Obsbot Meet SE
£79 from www.snipca.com/54725
Tested Issue 710

The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

PRICE DROP

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£188 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£80 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £80; 2TB costs £140.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £76 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 4...
CHERRY XTRFY M68 Pro Wireless gaming mice

Reporting every 0.125 milliseconds, CHERRY's XTRFY M68 Pro Wireless gaming mouse delivers incredible speed and extremely low click latency. By sending up to eight times more data than a standard 1000Hz gaming mouse, the M68 Pro Wireless makes your cursor movements more accurate on high refresh-rate monitors, and enables your computer to respond faster to every click.

As an evolution of the innovative M8, the M68 features a unique design crafted with input from elite gamers. With a new shape, size and an ultra-low front with a revamped button design, it delivers unmatched control in every movement.

This ultra-low front provides better control, and the low button height is enhanced further by added comfort grooves, improving your grip and accuracy. Its wireless technology has been refined over years, offering total freedom of movement without compromising speed and responsiveness.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/55081 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 1 July. Good Luck!

You can buy the **M68 Pro Wireless** gaming mouse for £118.39 from www.snipca.com/55082. For more CHERRY products, including keyboards, headsets and microphones, visit www.cherry.co.uk.

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£190 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £150 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£180 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000
More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £419 from www.snipca.com/52110

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£180 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £212 from www.snipca.com/52051

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HOW TO...

Manage Windows notifications on your PC

by Nik Rawlinson

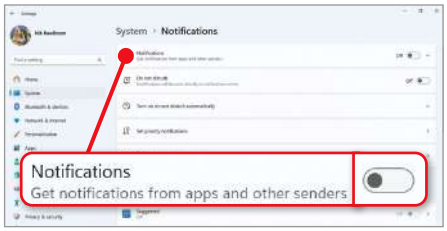
What you need: Windows 11 or 10 **Time required:** One hour

Windows can sometimes feel a little needy. Whether it's popping up alerts, directing you to incoming messages or allowing random software to disturb your flow, its constant demands for attention can be distracting if not downright infuriating. Thankfully, you can tame these constant interruptions to ensure you see only those you want.

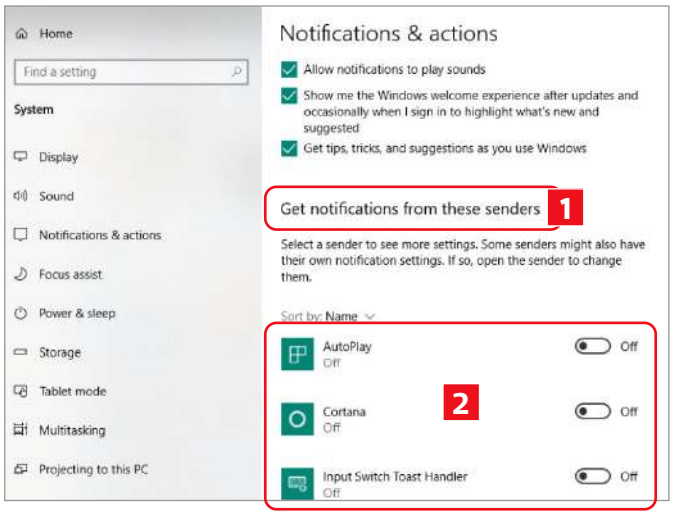
1 Turn off Windows notifications entirely

The most comprehensive option is to turn off Windows notifications completely. To do so in Windows 11, open Settings by pressing the Windows key+I, then click System, followed by Notifications. Turn off the slider in the Notifications block at the top of the screen (see screenshot below).

This is one of the settings that changed between Windows 10 and 11. So, if you're using Windows 10, open Settings and click 'Notifications & actions' in the sidebar. Now click the slider below 'Get notifications from apps and other senders' so it turns off.



The quickest way to silence your notifications is to turn them all off across Windows



Turn off these sliders to disable app notifications in Windows 10

2 Turn off notifications for specific programs

If turning off all notifications is going too far for you, take a more selective approach by blocking specific programs. Again, the settings are slightly different in Windows 10 and 11.

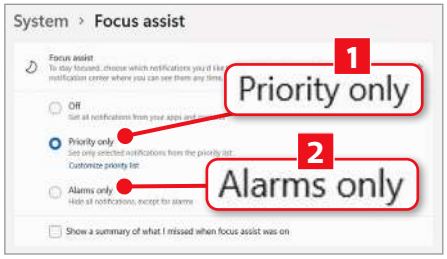
In Windows 11, open Settings, click System, followed by Notifications, then scroll down to the section 'Notifications from apps and other senders'. Click the sliders for the programs you want to silence so they're off.

If you're using Windows 10, scroll down from the 'Get notifications from apps and other senders' setting, to 'Get notifications from these senders' (1 in our screenshot above). Here, turn off the sliders beside any programs you don't want to hear from 2.

3 Temporarily silence Windows notifications

When you turn off notifications entirely, whether for a single program or Windows as a whole, you risk missing important alerts. However, even if you elect to keep some notifications, it's still annoying when they pop up while you're trying to focus on some important work, play a game or stream a TV programme. In these instances, Windows 10 users can use Focus Assist to temporarily switch them off – and later restore them – without diving into the full Settings program.

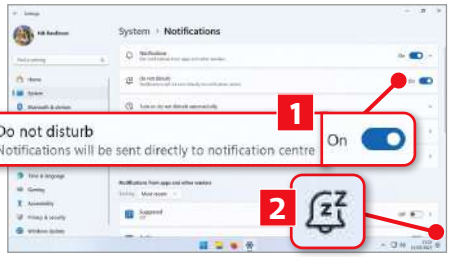
Open the Action Centre by pressing the Windows key+A. When it appears, click 'Focus assist' or 'Quiet hours' (Microsoft renamed 'Quiet hours' as 'Focus assist' in a 2018 update). If neither option appears but you see a down-pointing arrow, click this to reveal it.



'Focus assist' in Windows 10 lets you pick a limited number of programs or just alarms

'Quiet hours' was in effect an all-or-nothing setting. But 'Focus assist' gives you options for 'Priority only' (1 in our screenshot above), which allows a limited number of programs and contacts to notify you, or 'Alarms only' 2, which silences everything except an alarm. You can cycle through these settings by clicking the 'Quiet hours' button.

In Windows 11 Microsoft replaced 'Quiet hours' with 'Do not disturb'. To find this, open Settings (Windows key+I), then click System, followed by Notifications, and turn on the slider beside 'Do not disturb' (1 in screenshot below). You'll notice that a bell appears at the right-hand end of the taskbar, overlaid by two Zs 2. This indicates that notifications will be sent straight to the notification centre at the bottom right rather than shown on screen. To view them, click the bell.



Turn on 'Do not disturb' and alerts will be sent to the notification centre

This option is more flexible than you might initially think, because you can set Windows to allow a limited number of notifications to appear, rather than having them all sent straight to the notification centre. To specify which alerts will appear, scroll down to and click 'Set priority notifications'. You'll see that some programs already have the right to interrupt you, but you can include others by clicking 'Add apps' (1 in our screenshot above), and remove any you don't want to hear from by clicking the three dots to the right of their name, followed by Remove 2.

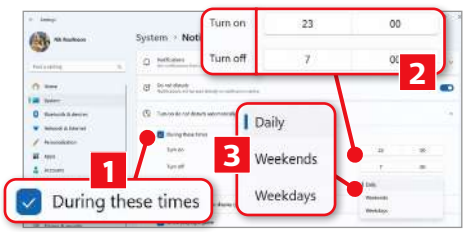
Two options at the top of the list allow incoming calls and reminders 3 to get through. Untick the checkboxes beside them to remove these permissions.

4 Schedule notifications to turn off automatically

It doesn't take much effort to turn on either 'Do not disturb' or 'Focus assist', but you might still want to automate the process – especially if you tend to leave your computer switched on around the clock.

In Windows 11, while still in the Notifications section of Settings, click 'Turn on do not disturb automatically', then tick the box beside 'During these times' (1 in our screenshot below). Now use the hour and minute boxes to the right of 'Turn on' and 'Turn off' to set the period during which you don't want to be disturbed 2. By default, your settings will apply every day, but you can change this to either weekends or weekdays by clicking the Daily dropdown menu to the right of Repeat and selecting the appropriate option 3.

There are also four preset 'Do not disturb' scenarios that you can apply for specific situations. These are listed immediately under your preset times. They apply when duplicating your screen (a common business scenario during which notifications could be an inconvenience), when playing a game, when using a program full-screen, and during the first hour after a significant Windows update session. You can opt



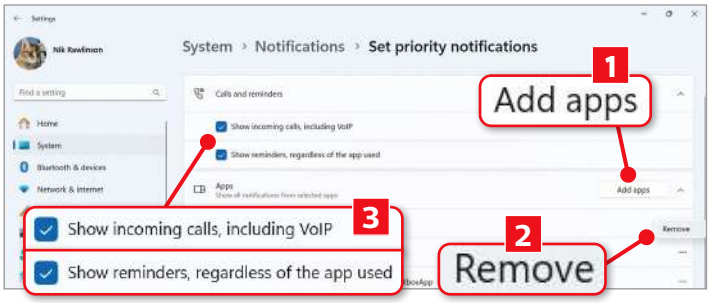
You can set Windows 11 to turn on 'Do not disturb' automatically at set times

How I manage my notifications

I've turned off all notifications for all programs, across all my computers (Windows, Linux and Mac). I've done this because I prefer to check manually to see if any software needs my attention. That way, I can turn to it when I'm ready to deal with whatever is waiting. This is true whichever of my machines I'm using. I've also turned off almost all notifications on my phone and, in particular, those that deal with social media.

Nik Rawlinson

Are you swamped by notifications on your PC? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk



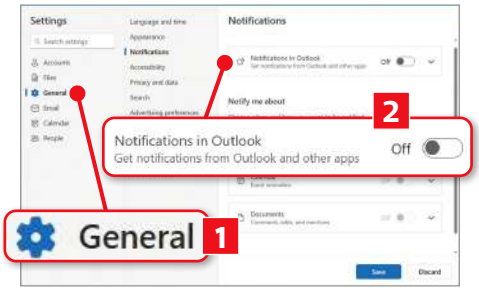
You can make notifications from some apps appear even if you've turned on 'Do not disturb'

WHICH NOTIFICATIONS SHOULD YOU KEEP ON?

The answer to this question will be different for everyone. Generally we'd recommend allowing your email software to tell you when new messages arrive. However, you can cut the number of interruptions, perhaps by reducing how often it checks the server for new messages. Would it really matter, for instance, if it checked once an hour, rather than every five minutes? You can always check manually if you're expecting an important message.

If you do decide to turn off email notifications, how you do so depends on which program you use to manage your email. If you're using Thunderbird, click the three lines on the right of the menu bar and select Settings. Next click General in the sidebar, then scroll down to 'Incoming mails' and untick both 'Show an alert' and 'Play a sound'.

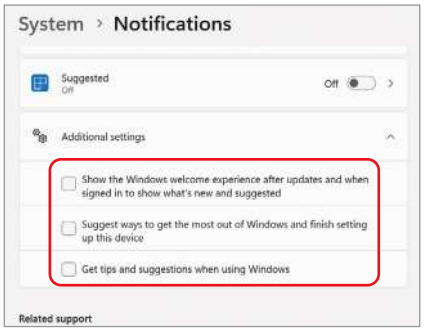
To turn them off in the new version of Outlook, click the gear icon on the program title bar, then General (1 in our screenshot above right), followed by



Notifications. Now turn off the slider beside 'Notifications in Outlook' 2. If you don't want to suppress all Outlook notifications, use the individual Mail, Calendar and Documents options to deactivate them one by one.

Chat programs, on the other hand, should probably be allowed to notify you as soon as a new message comes through. This type of communication is more conversational, so it requires a faster response.

Several Windows notifications provide general information, and you can safely turn these off if you don't find them useful. For example, open Settings and tap System


System › Notifications
Suggested
Off
Additional settings
Show the Windows welcome experience after updates and when signed in to show what's new and suggested
Suggest ways to get the most out of Windows and finish setting up this device
Get tips and suggestions when using Windows
Related support

followed by Notifications, then expand the 'Additional settings' section. Here, you can deactivate options for showing the Windows welcome experience after significant updates, ways to get more out of Windows, and general tips and suggestions (see screenshot above). If you're already familiar with Windows, you can probably manage without these.

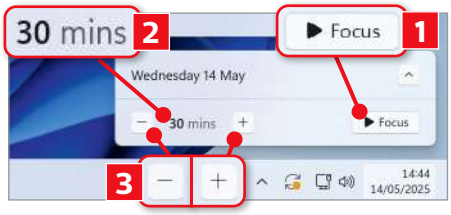
We advise that you don't switch off update alerts, notifications from Microsoft Defender/Windows Security or battery-saver messages on laptops.

out of any of these by unticking the box to the left.

You can do the same thing with 'Focus assist' in Windows 10. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click System, followed by 'Focus assist'. Now turn on the 'During these times' slider in the 'Automatic rules' section, and use the 'Start time' and 'End time' settings to specify the period when 'Focus assist' should automatically kick in. You can also choose which days it should apply, and which kinds of notifications you would still like to receive during those periods.

5 Start a focus session

With Windows 11, Microsoft introduced the concept of focus sessions. These are specific periods during which 'Do not disturb' is activated and flashing badges for apps on the taskbar are temporarily switched off to reduce distractions.



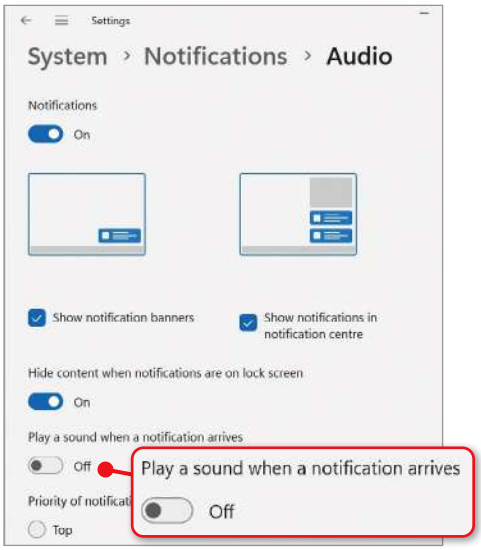
You can start a Focus session in Windows 11 from the notification area

To start a focus session, press the Windows key+N to open the notifications area, then click the Focus button at the bottom right (1 in our screenshot below left). Our computer is set to run Focus sessions of 30 minutes 2, but you can tailor this to your own requirements by pressing the '–' and '+' buttons 3.

You can access the complete range of focus session settings through the Settings app. Press the Windows key+I, then click System followed by Focus. Here you can change the default session length, as well as what is suppressed during a session. You'll notice that one of the options is to 'Show the timer in the Clock app'. To see how this works, open the Clock app, then click the 'Focus sessions' icon at the top left, followed by 'Start focus sessions'. You can add breaks in the 'Get ready to focus' section, during which you'll be able to catch up on any notifications that were silenced during the session.

6 Mute notification sounds

One compromise you might find useful is to keep notifications on but switch off the sounds they make when they appear. While you could do this by muting your speakers, that would also mean you couldn't hear music or streamed videos. Instead, open Settings then click System followed by Notifications. Now click Audio and then, on the following screen, turn off 'Play a sound when a notification arrives' (see screenshot above).



You can keep notifications on but turn off sounds when they appear

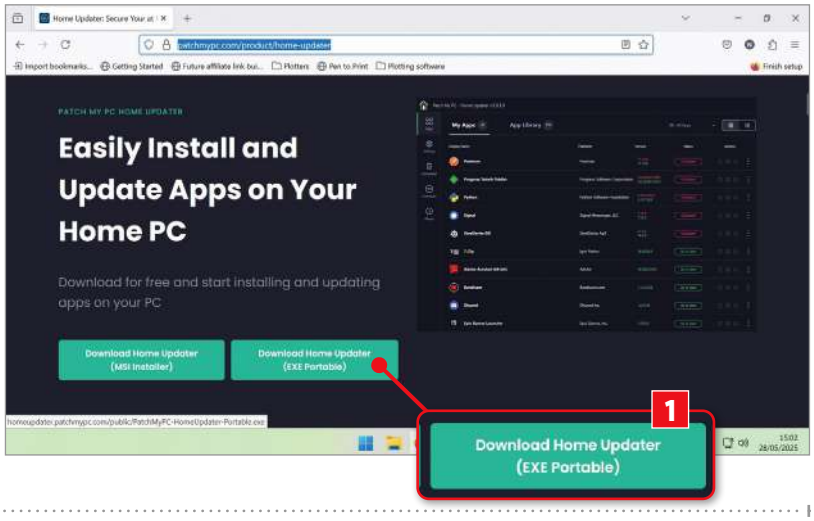
Update software on multiple PCs using a USB stick

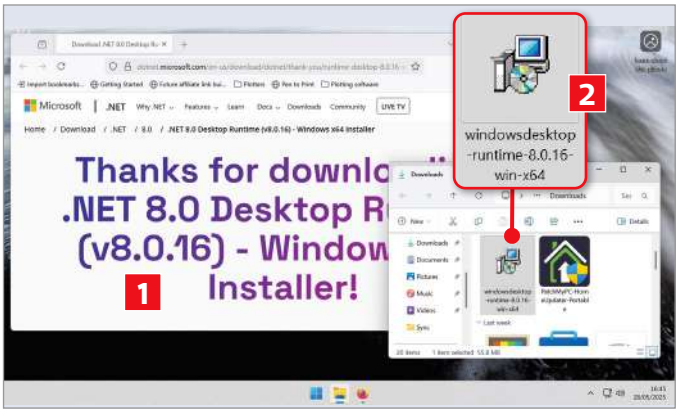
What you need: Patch My PC
Time required: 30 minutes

For safety and performance reasons we all understand the importance of keeping the software on our PCs up to date. But working out which of your installed programs needs an update and where the best place to download them from can be a time-consuming and risky business. Fortunately, Patch My PC (which has just received an update of its own) can help simplify matters. It detects outdated software on your machine, finds the relevant updates for you, and then installs them. Here, we'll show you how you can use the free home user version to quickly and easily bring multiple computers up to date.

STEP 1

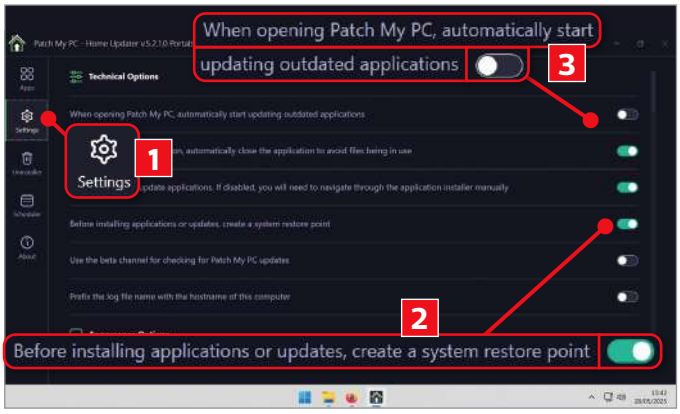
PatchMyPC is a free download from www.snipca.com/54984. The big change in the latest release is that it's available as a portable program, so you don't need to install it, and can instead run it straight from your Downloads folder. You can also copy it to a USB drive and plug this into your PCs, updating each one in turn without having to download and reinstall PatchMyPC every time. Visit the link above and click 'Download Home Updater (EXE Portable)' 1. When it's finished downloading, go to your Downloads folder and double-click the 'PatchMyPC-HomeUpdater-Portable.exe' file to launch it.


Easily Install and Update Apps on Your Home PC
Download for free and start installing and updating apps on your PC
Download Home Updater (MSI Installer)
Download Home Updater (EXE Portable)
1
Download Home Updater (EXE Portable)



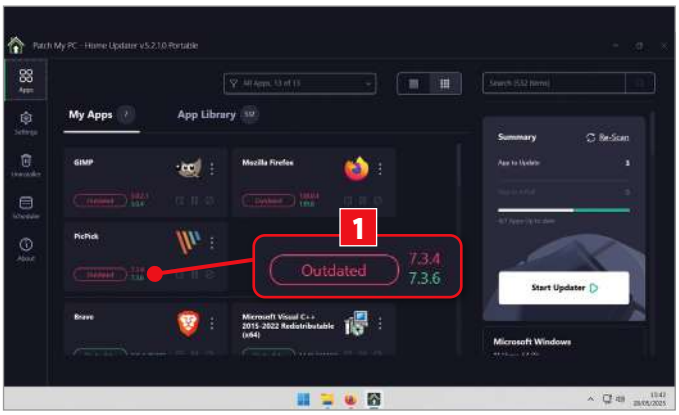
STEP 2

Patch My PC relies on .NET Desktop Runtime, which is code produced by Microsoft that takes care of a lot of common functions, saving developers from having to recreate that code themselves. If you don't already have it installed, you'll see an alert – click 'Download it now'. This opens the Runtime website 1. When it's finished downloading, launch the 'windowsdesktop-runtime-8.0.16-win-x64.exe' file 2 from your Downloads folder. Click Install, then Yes when prompted to 'allow this app to make changes to your device'. When it's finished installing, launch Patch My PC again.

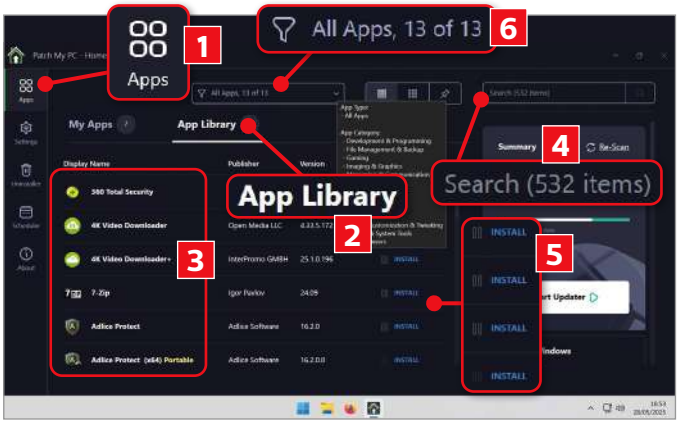

When opening Patch My PC, automatically start updating outdated applications
3
Settings
1
Before installing applications or updates, create a system restore point
2

STEP 3

The program immediately scans your PC for out-of-date software. Ignore the results for a moment and click Settings 1. Now, switch on the slider next to 'Before installing applications or updates, create a system restore point' 2. Ensure the slider next to 'When opening Patch My PC, automatically start updating outdated applications' 3 is switched off as we want to maintain manual control, though you can switch this on later if you prefer.

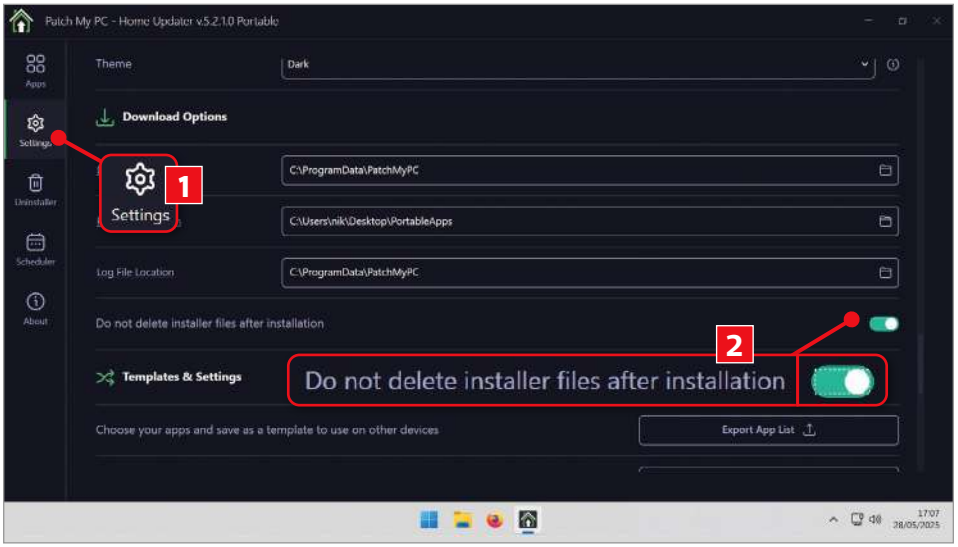


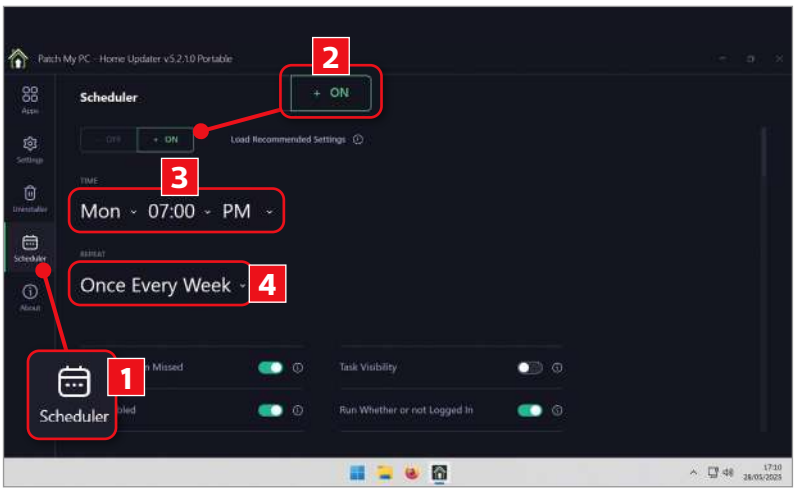
STEP 4 Click the Outdated button 1 below any program you want to update. Patch My PC will retrieve the latest available version and run the installer without you having to go through the onscreen steps. If you prefer to see what is happening, before clicking Outdated click Settings then turn off the slider next to 'Silently install and update applications. If disabled, you will need to navigate through the installer manually.



STEP 5 You can also use Patch My PC to install programs from scratch, which saves you hunting them down via a search engine. Click Apps 1, then App Library 2 and either scroll through the list of available software 3 or use the search box 4 if you already know what you're looking for. Click the Install link 5 next to any program you want to install. If you find the list overwhelming, click the All Apps menu 6 and choose a program category to focus on the software type you need.

STEP 6 When installing an update, Patch My PC needs to temporarily save the installation file on your hard drive. Once it's finished, it deletes it. If you would rather keep hold of the installer for use on another machine (to save you from having to download it a second time), open Settings 1, then scroll down to 'Do not delete installer files after installation', and click the slider next to it 2.





STEP 7 Now that you've updated your computer, why not keep it like that? Click Scheduler 1, followed by On 2. Now use the day and time dropdown menus 3 to select when Patch My PC should check for updates and specify how often it should repeat 4. Scroll down some more and click Save Schedule. If you are doing this, consider clicking Settings again and turning on the option to automatically start updating outdated applications we mentioned in Step 3.

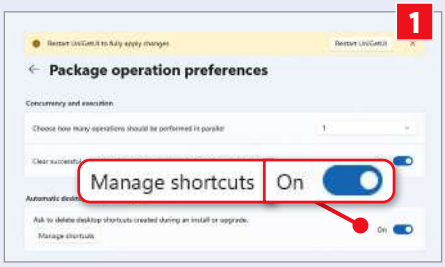
Readers' Tips

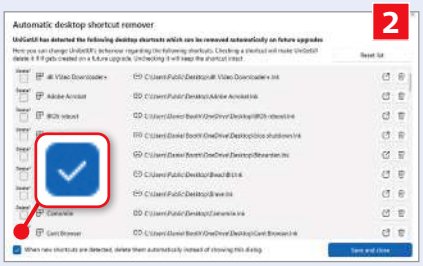
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Stop software cluttering your desktop with icons

I liked the sound of UniGetUI (www.snipca.com/54788) in Issue 710 (page 18), so downloaded it and it's a delightfully easy way to update software in one go. It even addresses my pet hate when downloading programs, which is when they add a shortcut icon to your desktop. Sometimes they ask permission, but not always.

There's an option in UniGetUI to stop software doing this. Click the Settings cog bottom left followed by 'Package operation preferences'. Now turn on the 'Automatic desktop shortcut remover' slider and click the 'Manage shortcuts' button (see screenshot 1). On the next page tick the box bottom left 2, then click 'Save and close'. Alternatively, tick the specific shortcut's box.





To finalise this change, click 'Restart UniGetUI', which appears in the yellow banner after you click 'Save and close'.

Alison Holden

Alison wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

HARDWARE

Upgrade Xbox controller to work with Windows 10 and 11

I had the same problem as Kevin Mann in Issue 710 (page 65, 'Why won't my Xbox controller connect to my new PC?'). I found that my controller from an older Xbox One X stopped working a few years ago, using older USB 2.0 or 3.0 ports on a new installation of Windows 10/11. I then upgraded to the newer Xbox controllers that are sold for the Xbox Series S and X models (pictured below left) and these do work on Windows 10/11 – as long as you connect the USB-C cable on the controller to a USB-C port on your computer (without using any adapters to try to fit it in a USB 3.0 or earlier socket).

Andrew Salvidge

HARDWARE

Set up a mini PC, monitor, keyboard and speakers

My friend needed a new computer for everyday tasks like email, web browsing, writing letters, watching YouTube and so on. They're on a limited budget, so using your recommendations and a little searching online I put together a system for just £355. From your recommendation in Issue 703 (page 23), I bought the NucBox M5 from GMKtec's site (www.snipca.com/53554, pictured above), with

Why I stopped using...

NordVPN

In Issue 710's Consumeractive (page 15) Peter Capps explained how NordVPN (https://nordvpn.com) was preventing him from printing or scanning on his Canon MX475. I've also had to abandon NordVPN.

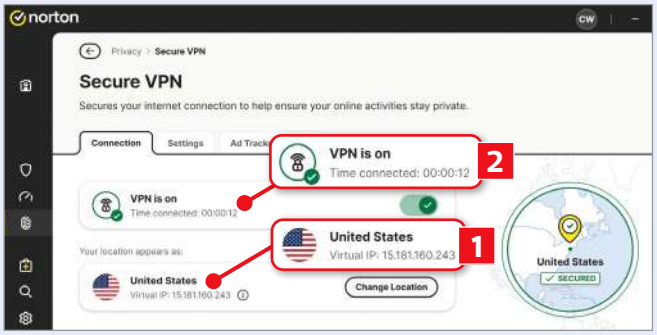
And what I use instead...

My problem wasn't related to printers. Instead, whenever I turned on NordVPN on my Windows 11 computer it kept blocking access to the internet.

I've raised several 'tickets' through NordVPN's support system (www.snipca.com/54902) and received various suggestions for fixing the problem, but without success. In some cases it seemed to be fixed, but the problem returned after restarting my computer a few times.

Around the same time I replaced my security software with your offer of **Norton 360 Premium** (£19.99 from www.snipca.com/54903) and the VPN included in the package works a treat. It shows where your location appears as (1 in our screenshot) and for how long 2.

Alan Armstrong



Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

16GB RAM and a 512GB SSD, for £220. Delivery only took about seven days, and they sent me daily updates.

I then spent £100 on Amazon for a BenQ GW2790 27in monitor (www.snipca.com/54883), and finally on Argos bought a Logitech wireless keyboard and mouse for £20 (www.snipca.com/54884) and some Majority DX10 speakers for £15 (www.snipca.com/54885). I've set everything up and it all suits their needs.

Mike Ridealgh

APPS

Scan and catalogue books using LibraryThing

Robert Irvine went to a lot of unnecessary effort in Issue 709 (page 74) to catalogue his book collection. He bought a handheld barcode scanner from Amazon (www.snipca.com/54607), but he's already got a scanner – his phone. He can simply install the LibraryThing app (www.librarything.com, pictured left) and use that to catalogue and browse his collection.

Scan
REVIEW
Books will be added to the following collection :
Your library
Edit
See America : a celebration of our national parks & treasured sites

You can add books by searching for them or scanning their ISBN barcode with the phone's camera. You can also fill in the details manually on LibraryThing's website, where you can see all the books you've scanned. There are other apps that do a similar job, but LibraryThing is free, though it does have adverts.

James Barton

LAPTOP

Use Chromebook's equivalent of Command Prompt

I still use a Windows 11 PC at home as my main computer, but I recently bought the HP Chromebook Plus 15.6 (£449 from www.snipca.com/53866) after reading your positive review in Issue 705 (page 23). I now use this when away from home instead of an old Windows 10 laptop that took ages to boot. It's a speedy device that's perfect for web browsing.

I realised before buying that ChromeOS has fewer features than Windows, but I was pleasantly surprised that it has an equivalent of Command Prompt. It's called Crosh and you open it by pressing Ctrl+Alt+T. It performs similar tasks to Command Prompt, so you can type memory_test to check memory, bt_console (see screenshot above) to fix Bluetooth problems, and ping followed by your domain to check how fast it's transferring data. To see every command type help.

crosh
Welcome to crosh, the ChromeOS developer shell.
If you got here by mistake, don't panic! Just close this tab and carry on
Type 'help' for a list of commands.
If you want to customize the look/behavior, you can use the options page.
Load it by using the Ctrl-Shift-P keyboard shortcut.
crosh> bt_console
Agent registered
AdvertisementMonitor path registered
[bluetooth]#
crosh> bt_console

Roy Morton

APP

Shuffle songs on your phone's iPod

My all-time favourite device is Apple's first iPod. I still have it somewhere, though haven't played it for years. I was interested therefore in the ClassiPod app (www.snipca.com/54512) for Android you listed in Issue 709's Best New Apps (page 44). It recreates the iPod as well as you could expect, and delivers a true nostalgic hit. It even has Shuffle, which was my favourite feature in the old iPod. Turn it on by tapping Menu (1 in our screenshot above) then Settings followed by Shuffle 2.

Peter Heath

Reader recommends...

SwannBuddy4K video doorbell

£133 from www.snipca.com/54905

I was a little surprised that SwannBuddy's 4K video doorbell didn't make the top three in Issue 707's 'Who's at your door?' Cover Feature. I bought one after your review in Issue 700 (page 28) emphasised the benefit of its vast memory. Last year, I decided to wean myself off all expensive tech subscriptions, so was happy to pay £133 upfront considering it comes with a 32GB memory card.

Slotting the microSD card in place is easy, and a couple of times we've retrieved the footage from the card to check suspicious movements outside. Doing this makes me feel more in control than letting manufacturers store the footage online. It's reassuring to know that it accepts 128GB cards, should we ever need to save more footage.

Video quality has been excellent every time we've viewed it, including footage captured at night. It also comes with a loud chime unit that you can place anywhere in the house. This is handy because my wife is hard of hearing and often didn't hear our old doorbell.

Richard Gregory

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

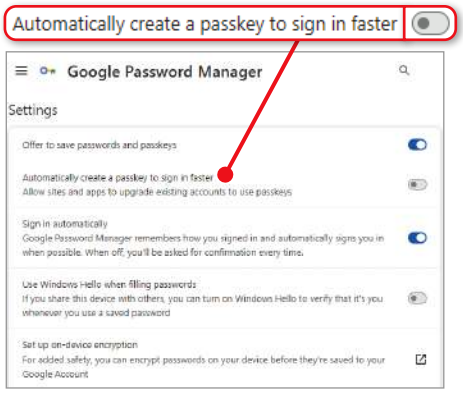
CHROME

Upgrade your passwords to passkeys

Chrome 136 (released in May) adds a useful option to the browser's password manager to help protect your online accounts. It automatically upgrades your passwords to passkeys, so you can sign into websites more quickly and securely using your fingerprint, face or other screen-lock method.

This only works on sites that support passkeys, which you've recently signed into using a saved password. The site will confirm a passkey has been created (you can still sign in using a password) and save it to Chrome's password manager.

The new option is enabled by default, but if you'd rather stick solely with passwords you can turn it off. Click Chrome's three-dot menu button and choose Settings, then 'Autofill and passwords'. Click 'Google Password Manager', select Settings and disable 'Automatically create a passkey to sign in faster' (see screenshot below).


Automatically create a passkey to sign in faster
Google Password Manager
Settings
Offer to save passwords and passkeys
Automatically create a passkey to sign in faster
Allow sites and apps to upgrade existing accounts to use passkeys
Sign in automatically
Use Windows Hello when filling passwords
Set up on-device encryption

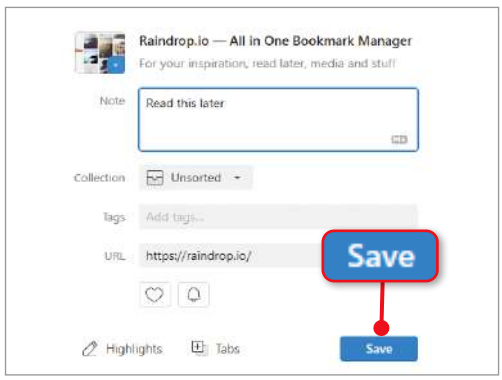
CHROMIUM & FIREFOX

Switch from Pocket to Raindrop.io

Mozilla will close its 'read it later' service Pocket on 8 July, and has removed the Pocket extension from its Add-ons store and the Chrome Web Store. Pocket was handy for saving interesting articles as you browsed the web, but Mozilla now wants to recommend content through Firefox's New Tab page.

The best alternative to Pocket is Raindrop.io (www.snipca.com/54945), which similarly lets you save web pages, images, videos and PDFs for later (see screenshot below left). It has extensions for all the main browsers, as well as Android and iOS apps, so you can access your saved content from anywhere.

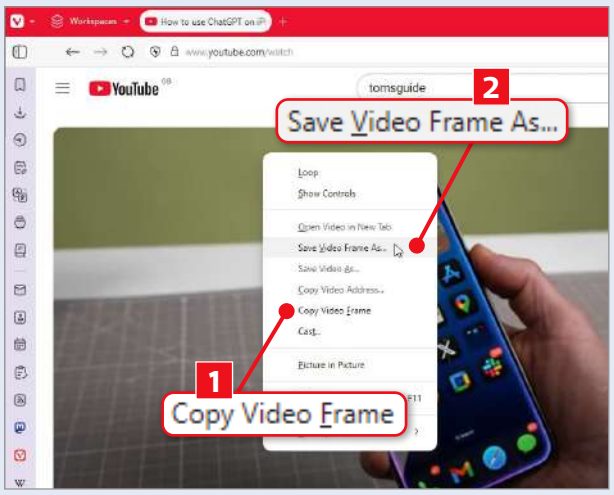
Raindrop.io is freemium, but its free plan includes all its essential features. You can import your data from Pocket before it disappears using the steps at www.snipca.com/54946.



VIVALDI

Capture screenshots of YouTube videos

Vivaldi 7.4, released in May, makes several improvements to the browser's interface to make it "lighter, cleaner and more intuitive". It also increases the maximum number of auto-complete suggestions in the address bar from 12 to 42.



To change the default, click Vivaldi's menu button and choose Settings, then Address Bar. Drag the Drop-Down Maximum Size slider to your preferred number of suggestions.

Best of all, Vivaldi 7.4 adds the option to capture screenshots of YouTube videos, as you can in Chrome and Edge. Right-click a YouTube video twice and select Copy Video Frame (1 in our screenshot) to save a screenshot of the current frame to your clipboard, to then paste into an image editor.

Alternatively, choose Save Video Frame As 2 to download the screenshot as a PNG file. You can change the file name to something more memorable.

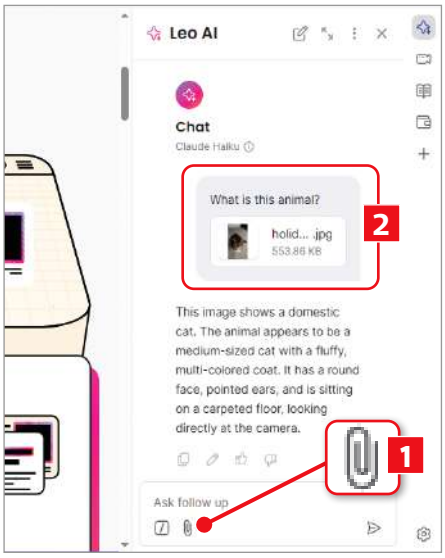
BRAVE

Upload images to Leo chats

Brave has updated its built-in AI assistant, Leo, with the option to upload images for analysis. This brings the tool closer in line with standalone chatbots such as ChatGPT and Gemini.

To use the new feature, open a chat window by clicking the Leo button on the browser's toolbar or sidebar. Click the attachment (paper-clip) icon (1 in our screenshot above) to select an image to upload – Leo supports PNG, JPEG and WEBP formats – and type your question 2.

Click the Send button and Leo will analyse the image and provide its answer. Unlike some chatbots, Leo can't edit or manipulate images.


Leo AI
Chat
Claude Haiku
What is this animal?
holid... .jpg
553.86 KB
2
This image shows a domestic cat. The animal appears to be a medium-sized cat with a fluffy, multi-colored coat. It has a round face, pointed ears, and is sitting on a carpeted floor, looking directly at the camera.
1
Ask follow up

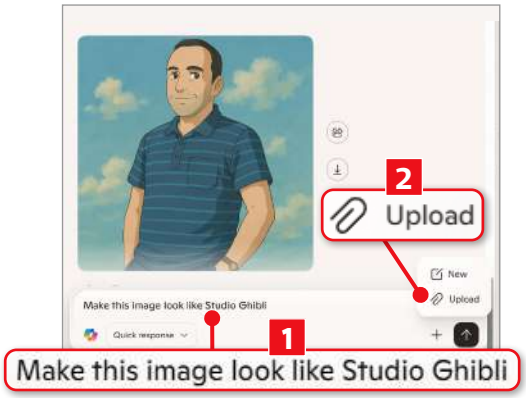
COPILOT

Generate higher-quality images

Microsoft has upgraded the AI model Copilot uses to generate images, to produce higher-quality results. It now uses the same GPT-4o model as ChatGPT, rather than the older and more limited Dall-E.

This means you can create more photo-realistic pictures of humans, with "richer detail and composition". Text is rendered more accurately and readably, and Copilot can handle more complex instructions.

As with ChatGPT, you can now ask Copilot to apply a particular artistic style (1 in our screenshot below) to an image you upload 2, and edit its content. It has a more generous (though unspecified) daily limit for image generation than ChatGPT's three.



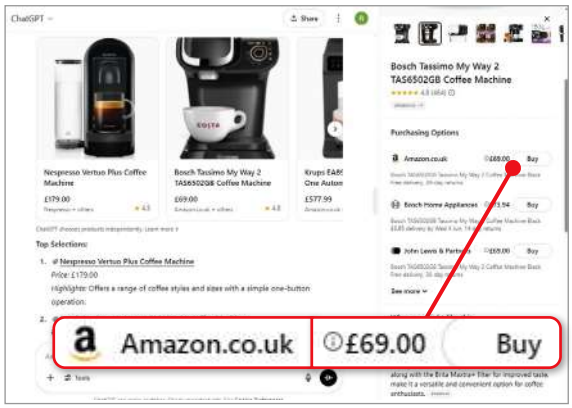
CHATGPT

Save money when shopping online

ChatGPT is continuing to expand its shopping features, providing links to relevant deals on retail sites for an increasing number of searches. This information is now available to all ChatGPT users in the UK, and you don't even need to be signed into your account.

The enhanced results include a carousel of matching products and lists of 'top picks'. Clicking one of these opens a sidebar comparing the price of that item at different online stores – click the Buy button (see screenshot below left) to visit that site and make your purchase. ChatGPT also summarises reviews of products, both from customers and professional reviewers.

OpenAI says "products are selected by ChatGPT independently and are not ads". It also gives some images labels such as 'Budget-friendly' or 'Most popular', but doesn't verify reviews or ratings.



GEMINI

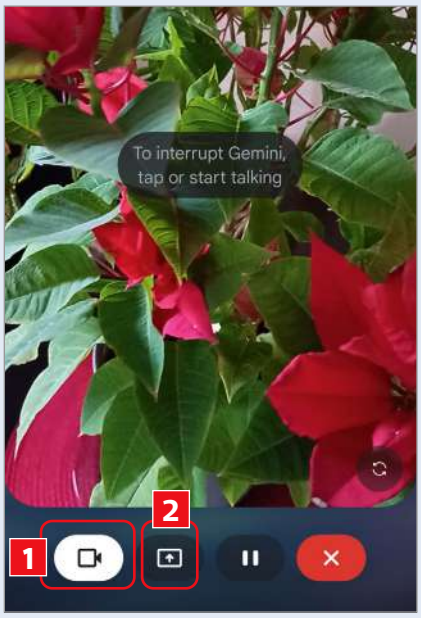
Share your camera and screen in Live mode

Gemini's Live mode is the best feature in the mobile version of Google's chatbot, letting you talk aloud to the AI assistant like you're speaking to a real person. It's now been made even more useful, by adding options to share your phone's camera and screen.

This means you no longer need to describe what you're seeing to Gemini, but can simply point your camera at the object or scene to ask questions about it. You can also show Gemini what you're viewing in other apps, such as a web page, video or document, to have it analyse and discuss the content.

Both new tools are available for free in Gemini's apps for Android (www.snipca.com/54877) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54878). To try them, tap the Live button in the bottom-right corner to start a spoken conversation.

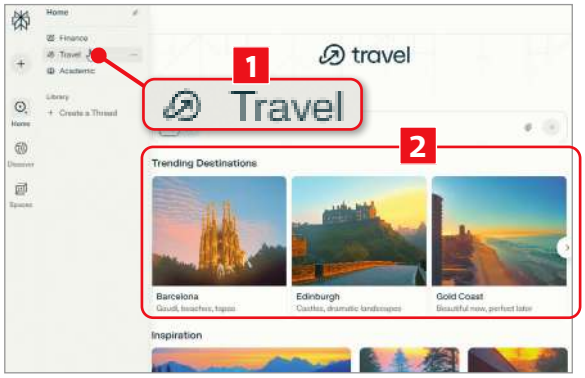
Press the Camera icon (1 in our screenshot) to activate your phone's camera and ask Gemini about the view. Or tap the Screen Sharing button 2 to either share your entire screen or a specific app.



PERPLEXITY

Get instant travel advice

Perplexity's new Travel section gives you reliable and up-to-date information when researching a holiday. To access it, click the left-hand toolbar on the Perplexity website (www.perplexity.ai) and choose Travel (1 in our screenshot above).



Here you'll find AI-curated content for Trending Destinations (when we checked these included Barcelona, Edinburgh and the Gold Coast in Australia 2), which includes advice on accommodation, transport, things to do and places to eat. There are also Inspiration categories, for example 'Forest hotels in Sweden'.

When you type into the search box, Perplexity's AI-powered autocomplete suggestions are tailored for travel, so you can quickly get answers to questions about hotels, attractions and other holiday topics.

Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID

Share files with nearby devices using mobile data

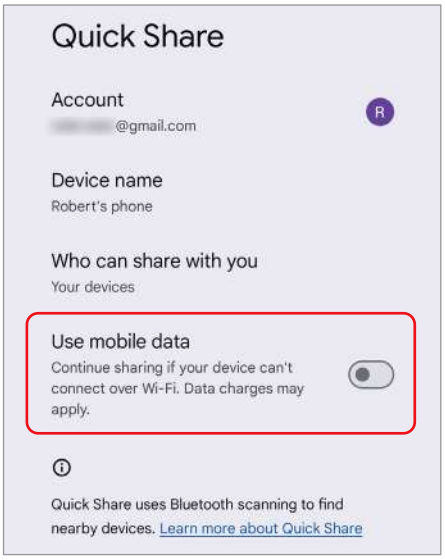
Google has updated the Quick Share feature for Android phones and tablets, which makes it easy to share files with nearby devices. Just tap the Share button at the top or bottom of the screen (depending on the app) and choose Quick Share to scan for and connect to nearby devices.

Previously, Quick Share used Wi-Fi to send files from one device to another, after establishing the initial connection using Bluetooth. It's now possible to share files over your mobile network when Wi-Fi isn't available.

This should ensure file transfers are always completed even if you lose your Wi-Fi connection before they've finished copying over. However, unless you're on an unlimited data plan with your mobile network, it could also eat into your monthly allowance.

The new option is enabled by default, but you can turn it off to reduce the risk of incurring data charges. Open the Settings app and choose 'Connected devices' then 'Connection preferences' – the setting may also be called 'More connectivity options'. Select 'Quick Share' and switch off 'Use mobile data' (see screenshot below left).

As we explained in Issue 704 (page 44), Quick Share also now lets you use QR codes to share files between nearby devices. Just tap the 'Use QR code' button on the Quick Share screen.

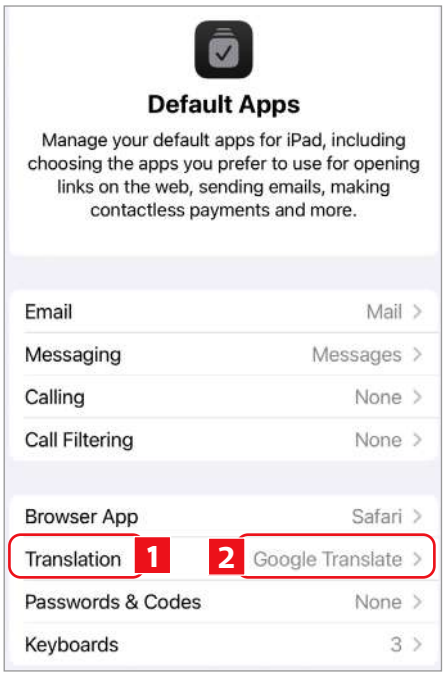

Quick Share
Account
@gmail.com
R
Device name
Robert's phone
Who can share with you
Your devices
Use mobile data
Continue sharing if your device can't connect over Wi-Fi. Data charges may apply.
Quick Share uses Bluetooth scanning to find nearby devices. Learn more about Quick Share

iOS

Set Google Translate as your default translation app

Even diehard Apple fans must admit that its Translate app isn't as good as Google Translate. It has a 2.2-star rating in the Apple App Store (www.snipca.com/54943), where unimpressed reviewers call it "buggy" and "horrible".

Although you can install Google Translate (4.2 stars, www.snipca.com/54944) on your iPhone or iPad, Apple Translate automatically carries out all translation requests, such as converting foreign text on web pages and asking Siri to translate a word or phrase.


Default Apps
Manage your default apps for iPad, including choosing the apps you prefer to use for opening links on the web, sending emails, making contactless payments and more.
Email Mail
Messaging Messages
Calling None
Call Filtering None
Browser App Safari
Translation 1
2 Google Translate
Passwords & Codes None
Keyboards 3

Happily, following the release of iOS 18.4 – which lets you change some default apps – Apple now lets you set Google Translate as your default translation app. Update Google's tool to the latest version and it will handle all your translation needs, with support for more than 200 languages.

To switch from Apple Translate, open the Settings app and tap Apps followed by Default Apps. Select 'Translation' (1 in our screenshot above) and choose Google Translate 2 to make it your default translation app.

BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

Action Notch

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/54949

This app turns the camera hole at the top of your phone's screen into a customisable button. You can then assign actions to perform when you tap or long-press this button, such as taking a screenshot, opening your camera or adjusting screen brightness. Tap 'Fix it' to grant Action Notch the required accessibility permission.

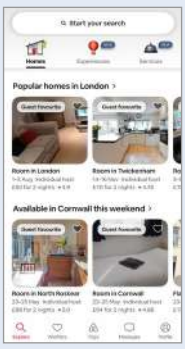
Airbnb

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54957

iOS www.snipca.com/54958

Airbnb's redesigned app includes a new Explore tab, which recommends places to stay in the following weekend or later in the year, and an updated Experiences section, which suggests things to do in popular cities. There's also a new Services feature, which lets you book personal trainers, photographers, chefs and masseurs through the app.



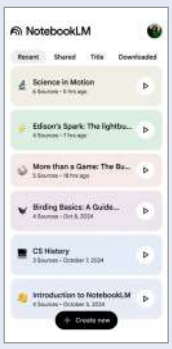
NotebookLM

Free

Android www.snipca.com/54959

iOS www.snipca.com/54960

Google's brilliant AI-powered research tool now has a dedicated app for phones and tablets. Add documents, videos, web pages and other sources to NotebookLM and it will summarise and answer your questions about their content. Best of all, the app can turn your notebooks into podcasts using the Audio Overviews feature.

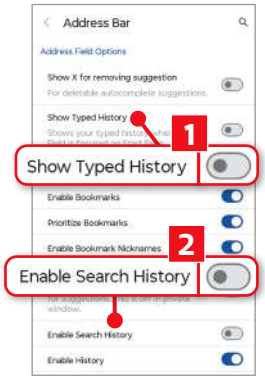


*Contains in-app purchases

ANDROID & iOS

Master the new options in Vivaldi

Vivaldi has updated its browser for Android (www.snipca.com/54951) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54950), and as usual the two apps get some different new features. One addition common to both stops your search history and previously typed web addresses appearing in auto-complete suggestions.



Press the Vivaldi menu button, select Settings and tap Address Bar. Switch off the settings Show Typed History (1 in our screenshot left) and Enable Search History 2.

The Android browser now gives you one-tap access to Vivaldi's 'Reader view', when you want to remove all the clutter from web pages to focus on the text. Select 'Content Settings' on the Settings screen, tap Accessibility and switch on 'Reader view for web pages'. Next choose 'Appearance & Theme', activate 'Toolbar shortcut' and select 'Reader view for web pages'. This adds a shortcut to Vivaldi's toolbar that you can tap to de-clutter pages.

The iOS browser gains a useful option already available in the Android app, which allows audio to keep playing in the background when you switch tabs or use other apps. Go to Settings, tap General and enable the setting 'Allow media playback in background' ('Allow background audio playback' on Android).

ANDROID & iOS

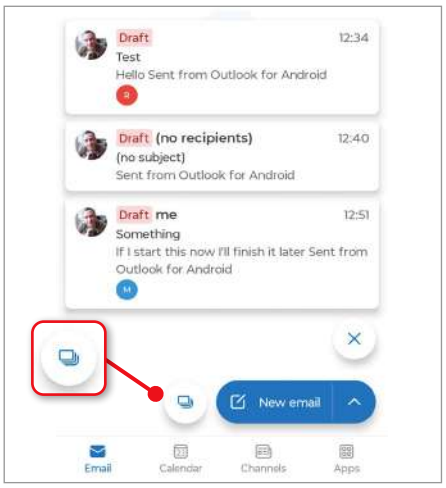
Don't lose your email drafts in Outlook

When you leave the 'New message' screen before sending an email, Outlook automatically saves a draft of the message for you to resume writing later. These abandoned emails are stored in your Drafts folder, where there's a risk you'll forget about them – meaning some messages never get sent.

To stop this happening, Microsoft has updated the Outlook app for Android (www.snipca.com/54953) and iOS (www.snipca.com/54954) with the useful option to minimise your email drafts. This makes them much easier to retrieve than having to open the Drafts folder every time.

When you need to pause writing a message to do something else, tap the new Minimise icon in the top-right corner of the screen. This will minimise your email draft to a circular 'dock' next to the 'New email' button (see screenshot right).

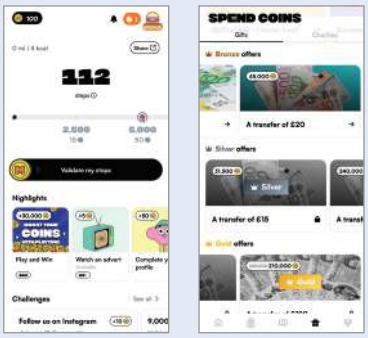
Tap this dock to view a list of your saved drafts, then press a message to resume writing it. You can minimise as many emails as you want, and swipe left or right to remove them from the dock.



BEST APPS FOR... Walking motivation

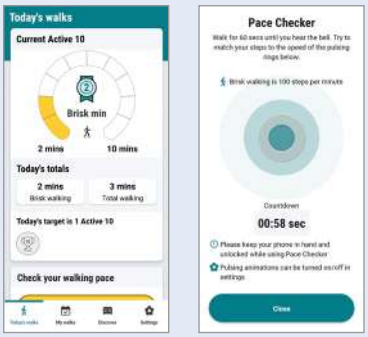
Macadam

Free
Android www.snipca.com/54961
iOS www.snipca.com/54962
Boasting more than seven million users, Macadam lets you earn virtual coins by walking, using your phone's pedometer to count your steps. These coins can be traded in for real money or gift cards, and you can earn more by answering surveys, watching ads and completing challenges, such as finding hidden coins in your area.
Best For Getting paid to walk



NHS Active 10 Walking Tracker

Free
Android www.snipca.com/54965
iOS www.snipca.com/54966
Rather than just count your steps, this NHS app challenges you to walk briskly for at least 10 minutes a day, to help you stay fit and lose weight. Hitting your daily, weekly and monthly targets unlocks trophies, and you can track your progress over time. Use the new Pace Checker tool to determine how fast you should walk for it to qualify as 'brisk'.
Best For Walking more briskly



Go Jauntly

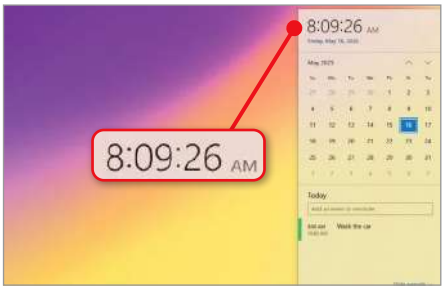
Free*
Android www.snipca.com/54964
iOS www.snipca.com/54963
Go Jauntly suggests scenic, historic and interesting walks in your area, providing directions, high-quality photos and offline maps. We particularly like its Amble Anywhere feature, which plots walking routes from your home, ranging from short jaunts to eight-mile treks. Some walks require a £3.99 monthly subscription.
Best For Discovering walking routes

*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 10

Bring back the time in the Calendar box

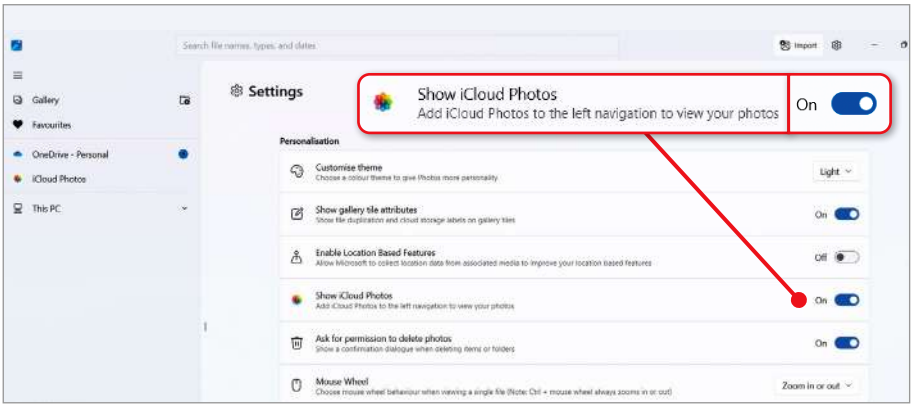
With the update KB5053643, released in April, Microsoft removed the time from the top of the Calendar box that appears when you click the bottom right of the Windows 10 taskbar. Microsoft made the change to reduce strain on the processor, but it still annoyed many users, who called for its return. It seems that Microsoft took notice because it has reinstated the time in the recent update KB5058481 (as shown in the screenshot below). It's available to Windows Insiders now and should be coming to all users soon (see www.snipca.com/54940).



WINDOWS 10 & 11

See photos taken on your iPhone and iPad on your PC

You can easily view photos taken on your iPhone and iPad on your Windows 11 PC, saving you the hassle of emailing them to yourself. Install Apple's 'iCloud for Windows' app (www.snipca.com/54952), then sign in with your Apple ID and turn on photo syncing. Next, in Windows 11, open the Photos app in Windows and click the Settings cog top right. Now make sure the 'Show iCloud Photos' slider is turned on (see screenshot below) then click 'iCloud Photos' on the left. In Windows 10, look for the 'iCloud Photos' under Pictures in File Explorer.

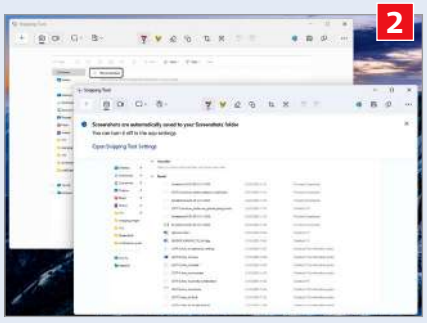


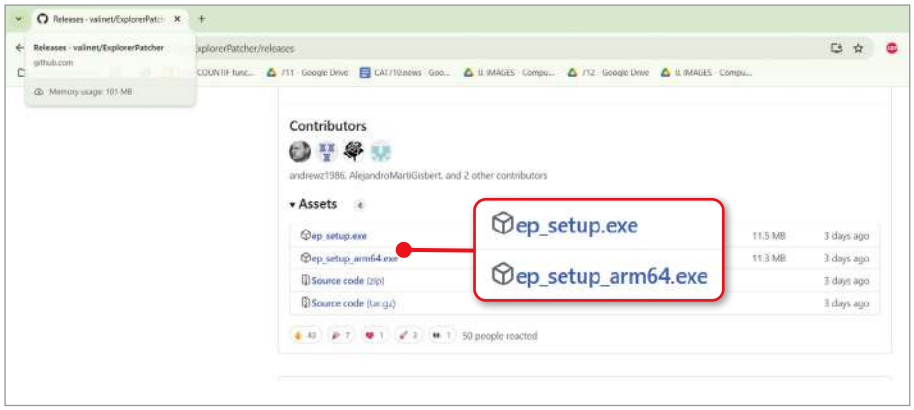
WINDOWS 11

Compare screenshots side by side

Snipping Tool has a useful setting that saves screenshots in separate windows, making it easy for you to compare them side by side. The setting is turned off by default, so first search for and then open Snipping Tool, then click the three dots top right followed by Settings. Now turn on the 'Multiple windows' slider (see screenshot 1).

Next, take a screenshot and open it in Snipping Tool. Press Ctrl+N and take another screenshot and you'll be able to open it alongside your existing one 2. Keep doing this until you've got all the screenshots you need.





WINDOWS 11

Unblock Windows-tweaking software

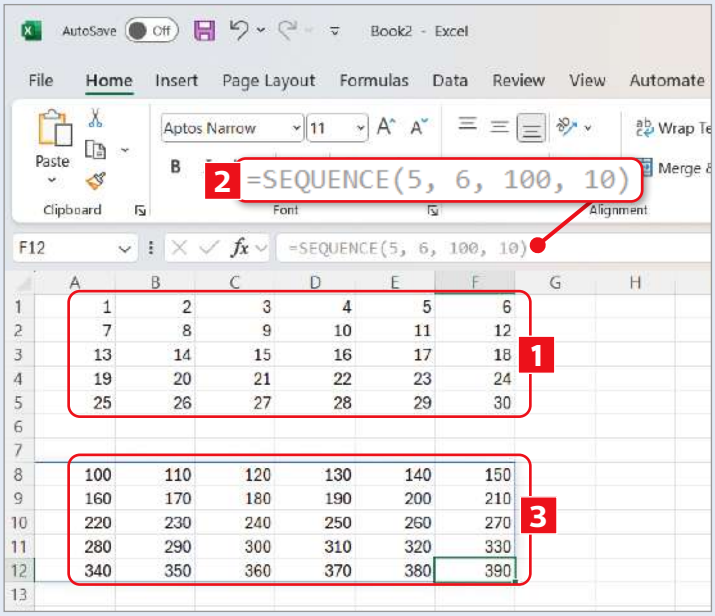
Last year, Microsoft Defender started to block some unofficial tools that let you change how Windows works. It said this was for security reasons, but it was an unnecessarily cautious approach that prevented users from tweaking elements like the Start menu, taskbar and File Explorer.

One of the best tools it blocked was ExplorerPatcher (see Issue 663's 'Make Windows great again' Cover Feature), which lets you make several useful hacks such as resizing icons, moving the taskbar and adding items to the right-click menu. Its developers have released a new version (22631.5335.68.2) that it says beats Microsoft's blocks, letting you install and use it in Windows 11 24H2.

Download it from its GitHub page by visiting www.snipca.com/54956 then scrolling down to and clicking the Assets heading, followed by the 'ep_setup.exe' link or 'ep_setup_arm64.exe' (see screenshot above) if your computer has an ARM processor.

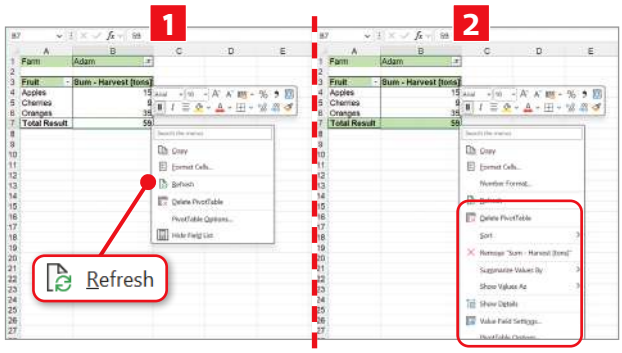
MICROSOFT EXCEL

Create number sequences in spreadsheets



In Excel 2021 (and Microsoft 365), Microsoft added the =SEQUENCE function to let you easily generate a list of sequential numbers in an array of cells. For example, typing =SEQUENCE(10) fills the numbers 1 to 10 vertically in a single column, while =SEQUENCE(1,10) fills them across 10 columns horizontally.

We've typed =SEQUENCE(5,6) , which fills numbers row by row, down five rows and across six columns (1 in our screenshot). The first number before the comma sets the number of rows, and the second sets the columns. You can also use it to start at a specific number and pick a different sequence. For example, =SEQUENCE(5,6,100,10) 2 keeps the same five-row/six-column structure, but starts the sequence at 100 and jumps 10 each time 3.



LIBREOFFICE CALC

Open pivot tables exported to Microsoft Excel

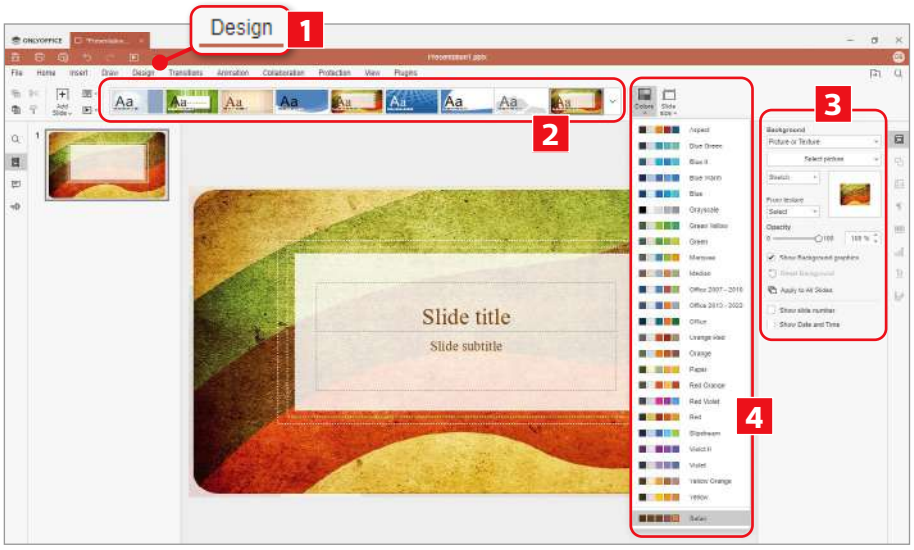
Pivot tables in spreadsheets quickly summarize and analyze your data. Unlike a standard 'static' table, you can rearrange rows and columns to spot patterns and calculate totals without changing any of the original data.

They're extremely useful, so we're pleased that LibreOffice has updated Calc so you can fully export them to Microsoft Excel. Previously, when you saved a Calc spreadsheet as an Excel (XLSX) file, pivot tables lost all their data when you reopened the file in Excel. This meant you had to right-click them and select Refresh (see screenshot 1 above) to bring back the data. LibreOffice fixed this in the update 25.2.3, which arrived at the end of April. It means when you now open pivot tables in Excel you'll see all the actions you could normally perform without having to refresh them 2.

ONLYOFFICE

See presentation templates in new Design tab

Version 8.3 of OnlyOffice, released in February, added a new Design tab to the Presentation tool (1 in our screenshot below). Click it and you'll see all the templates available for your slides 2, and options on the right for changing elements such as opacity, gradient and texture 3. There's also a dropdown menu to change the colours on your slides 4.



MICROSOFT WORD

Go to last edit in a document

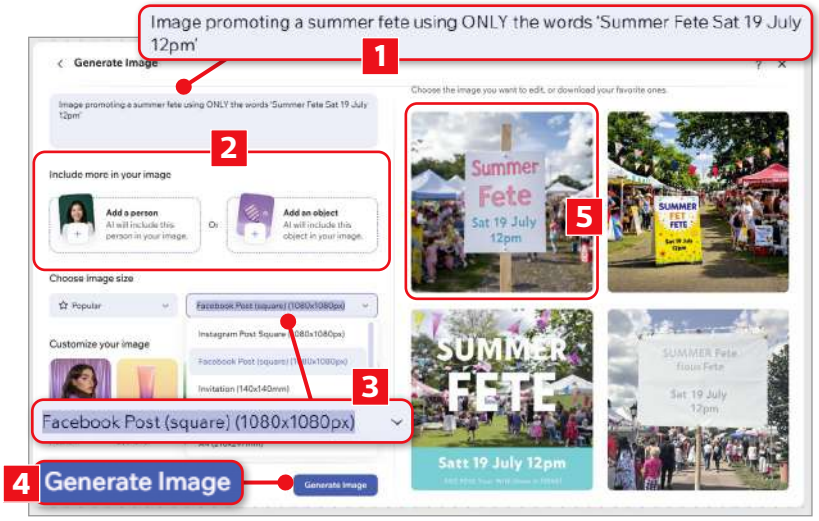
When editing in Word, you can press Shift+F5 to go back to your last edit, no matter where it was in your document. In fact, you can press it up to three times to go back to your most recent three edits, saving you the hassle of long scrolling. Note that on some laptops you'll need to also hold down the Fn button to activate the tasks performed by the F1 to F12 buttons. Pressing F5 by itself in Word brings up the 'Find and Replace' box. In LibreOffice Writer the Shift+F5 shortcut moves the cursor to the position it had when you last saved the document. The shortcut doesn't do anything in OnlyOffice.

In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Create free AI images using Wixel

AI image-generating tools like Adobe Firefly (see Issue 663), Microsoft Designer (691) and Canva (698) let you generate images simply by describing what you want. There's now another program to try – Wixel, launched in May by the website builder Wix. It specialises in creating images to use online, such as on social media, YouTube and your own website. Here we'll explain how to generate an image to promote a summer fete on Facebook.



Type your prompt, add people and objects if you want, then select a size

Type your prompt and add extra elements

Visit www.wix.com/wixel then click Get Started and enter your email address to create an account. You'll be prompted to sign up for a free 14-day trial, but ignore this. Instead, on Wixel's dashboard, click 'Generate a Custom Image' under the 'Create with AI' heading (if you can't find the dashboard, go to it directly at www.snipca.com/54978).

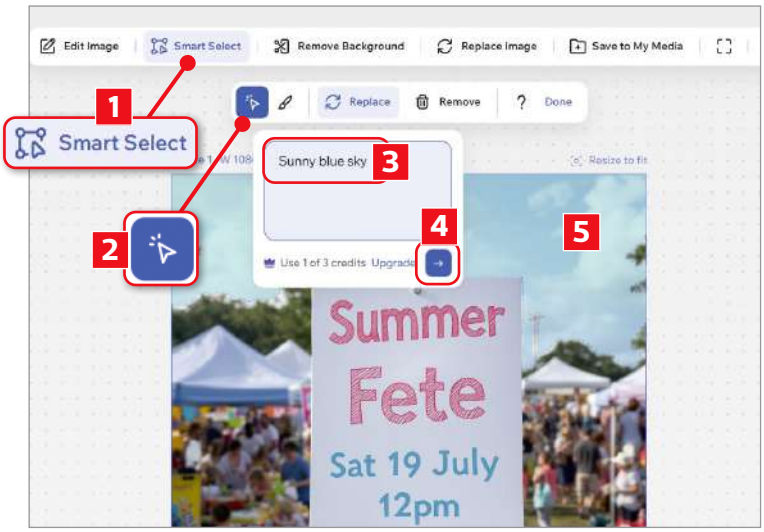
Now type your prompt into the text box, using as many details as you can, including any words you want included in quote marks. Like most AI tools, Wixel sometimes adds nonsense words. Try avoiding this by using the word ONLY capitalised for emphasis. For example, we typed Image promoting a summer fete using ONLY the words 'Summer Fete Sat 19 July 12pm' (1 in our screenshot above).

Getting the words correct is vital because Wixel doesn't let you edit text.

Now choose to add people or objects from your own images 2, then select a size based on how you want to share it (we've chosen the Facebook option 3). Click 'Generate Image' 4 at the bottom and Wixel will produce four images based on your prompt.

Like all image-generating tools, you'll need some trial and error to get what you want. It took us several attempts before Wixel got the words correct, and even then it was only in one of the images (top left 5). But we had instant success with images that had fewer words (for example, 'Quiz night' and 'Jumble sale').

We chose 'Smart Select' then asked Wixel to replace the clouds with a blue sky



Each set of images uses one of your 10 free daily credits (you'll see this at the bottom left). You can sign up with more than one email address to get more daily credits. The Pro version gives you 1,000 credits a month for £8 a month or £69 a year.

Download and edit your image

If you like the image, hover over it then click the download arrow. You're now free to use it how you like. If you want to edit it before downloading, click the Edit button when you hover over the image. You'll see several options along the top. Try 'Edit Image' first, where you can perform standard edits like cropping, applying filters and adjusting lighting.

You can use AI to replace part of the image. Click 'Smart Select' (1 in our screenshot left) then the 'Select object' icon 2. Now click on a part of the image you want to replace – we chose the clouds. Now click Replace at the top and type what you want to see in the image instead – we typed Sunny blue sky 3 – then click the arrow button 4. Note that this uses one of your credits. This worked well for us, as you can see 5. There's also an option to remove parts of the image.

When you've finished click Done followed by the Download button top right – or click 'Save to My Media' to save it within Wixel. You can save up to 5GB for free, and 1TB in the Pro version.

Next issue: Track who has opened your club emails

What's All the

Fuss About...

Bing Video Creator

Microsoft's new app lets you use one of the best AI tools for free

What is it?

Microsoft's new AI tool for generating and sharing five-second videos based on what you type. Videos are created in 9:16 aspect ratio (with 16:10 coming soon) and are saved for 90 days. It's powered by Sora, the much-hyped video-generating tool from OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT. Microsoft gushes that Bing Video Creator "empowers anyone to turn their words into wonder through an AI-generated video".

And does it do that?

Well, it depends what you type. First though you need to install the Microsoft Bing Search app on your phone (a desktop PC version is coming soon). Visit www.snipca.com/55068 then either click the links to go to the Apple App Store (iPhone) or Google Play Store (Android), or scan the QR code. Open the app, then tap the bottom-right square icon followed by Video Creator. Now type a description of the video you want. You can also type directly into the Bing mobile app search bar, "Create a video of...".

Will it generate anything I type?

No, it won't create sexual, violent or harmful content, nor videos featuring real people. But it's pretty good at more innocent or surreal descriptions. On its blog (www.snipca.com/55067) Microsoft shows a video for the prompt "In a busy Italian pizza restaurant, a small otter works as a chef and wears a chef's hat and an apron. He kneads the dough with his paws and is surrounded by other pizza ingredients." Sure enough, it's a small otter wearing a chef's hat kneading dough while making a pizza (pictured right).

But when would I ever need to create that?

Perhaps if you open a pizza restaurant and want to advertise for part-time otter chefs? It's a frivolous example, but Microsoft does give rather more useful ones, such as a fish wearing a party hat (also pictured). There are worse ways to wish someone a happy birthday. Like all AI tools though, getting it right takes some trial and error.

Did it work for you then?

Eventually. When we asked for a "Cheerful chimp wishing you a happy father's day", the card it was holding said only "happy day". We tried "merry monkey" and "beaming baboon" before finally striking gold with "grinning gorilla". It even got the apostrophe right (pictured above), which we weren't expecting. By then though we were running out of free 'Fast' creations.

This is what Bing thinks a pizza-making otter looks like...

...and a fish getting in the mood for partying

> "We tried "merry monkey" and "beaming baboon" before finally striking gold with "grinning gorilla"

So there's a limit?

Yes – you're only allowed 10 'Fast' videos when you first install the app and sign into your Microsoft account. These are created within "just a few minutes". After that you're stuck with 'Standard' videos, which Microsoft says takes "approximately several hours per video".

How long?

Long enough to lose the will to live while you wait. But Microsoft might be doing itself a disservice because when we tried the app it created our Standard videos almost as quickly as the fast ones. And you can 'buy' a Fast video by spending 100 Microsoft Reward points (see www.snipca.com/55069), earned by completing quizzes and daily tasks.

Ah, so it's just an exercise to get people to use Rewards?

Partly – and to encourage people to install the Bing app. But it's also the only place you can try Sora for free, and that's the true value of the tool. Previously to use Sora you had to pay around £20 a month for a ChatGPT subscription. For that money, we'd want a *real* otter to come and cook us a margherita.

WATCH TV ANYWHERE!

Take your favourite TV shows with you wherever you go in the UK and abroad. Robert Irvine explains the best ways to beat restrictions on watching TV while you travel

You don't go on holiday to watch TV, but it can certainly come in useful. When you're confined to a hotel room, holiday cottage or caravan due to bad weather, tiredness or illness, or enduring a long train or plane journey, a bit of entertaining telly helps you pass the time and relax.

Although most holiday accommodation provides a TV set, the choice of channels will depend on the country you're visiting and may be limited, in a foreign language or mostly rubbish. You may even get a smart TV, but may not feel comfortable signing into your streaming accounts on a set you don't own. If you forget to sign out, the next guests will have full access to your data – unless a private 'guest mode' has been set up.

Thankfully, there are lots of ways to keep watching your favourite shows while you're away from home, whether you're travelling in the UK or abroad. It obviously isn't practical to cram a 42in TV into your suitcase, but other devices and services will give you instant access to your preferred entertainment for the duration of your break.

Here, we recommend the best options for watching TV wherever you go. Some are free while others require a subscription or one-off payment. We've included their prices along with details of any caveats to be aware of before you head off.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Stream live and on-demand TV in the UK and abroad
- Download TV shows to watch offline while travelling
- Carry your favourite programmes on a portable drive
- Set up a media server to watch TV shows remotely
- Access UK-only streaming services when overseas
- Plug your streaming stick into TVs when you're away from home

WATCH TV ON STREAMING SERVICES

Stream TV in the UK using broadcasters' apps

All the main providers of free TV in the UK – BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and U (formerly UK TV) – have their own mobile apps (plus STV Player for Scottish viewers), so you can watch their shows live and on-demand on your phone or tablet. If you take your laptop on holiday, you can stream these services through their websites in your browser.

Provided you have a Wi-Fi connection, or a strong 4G/5G signal (and generous data plan), you'll be able to enjoy your favourite programmes from most Freeview channels wherever you go in the UK. For channels you only get with a subscription, you can use your TV provider's app or web player to stream shows, films and sport while you're away from home.

Sky customers should download the Sky Go app (www.snipca.com/54990), which is included with all Sky subscriptions and also available for Windows. Tap its TV Guide tab (see screenshot above) to stream what's on now, or tap Browse to play shows on-demand.

Virgin Media viewers can install the Virgin TV Go app (www.snipca.com/54993) or sign into the service in their browsers (www.snipca.com/54991). And BT/EE customers can use the EE TV app and Web Player (www.snipca.com/54994).

All these services give you access to live channels and catch-up content, including box sets of popular series. Your account may limit how many devices you can watch on, so ensure the one you're taking on holiday is included.

Sky Go lets you stream live and on-demand TV when you're away from home

Watch global streaming services while on holiday

When travelling abroad, you won't be able to stream UK TV channels without using a VPN or other workaround (see page 55). This is due to content-licensing restrictions, and the BBC, ITV and other broadcasters will automatically detect and block your device's IP address when you try to access them from another country.

In contrast, global streaming services including Netflix, Disney+ and Prime Video allow you to keep watching when you travel abroad. However, their choice of TV shows and films will update automatically according to the country you're visiting. So if, for example, you're in Majorca, you'll see the Netflix catalogue for Spain but not series that are exclusive to its UK library. You'll still have plenty to choose from, but because British and American shows will be dubbed into a foreign language, you'll need to tweak Netflix's settings to switch to the English audio track or subtitles.

Amazon says "outside of your home country, a selection of Prime Video titles will be available to stream" (www.snipca.com/54998). These include Amazon Originals series and content you purchase before leaving the UK.

You can find out which TV shows are available on regional versions of streaming services using Stream With VPN (www.streamwithvpn.com). Select a service (1 in our screenshot below left), choose the country you're travelling to in the 'available from' menu 2 then click the 'but not in' menu 3 and choose 'Don't filter out any country'.

Click 'Show me' followed by TV Shows to view series you'll be able to watch on holiday. Annoyingly, Stream With VPN now only displays the full list of titles if you pay £10 for an annual subscription. But you can still see the most popular shows for free, and search for a specific programme to see which countries it's available in.

Stream TV abroad without a subscription

If you don't subscribe to a streaming service, try Plex's free TV service (www.snipca.com/54999) when you're travelling. This lets you watch hundreds of 'live' FAST (free ad-supported streaming television) channels and thousands of TV shows and films on-demand on your phone, tablet or laptop, without paying a subscription.

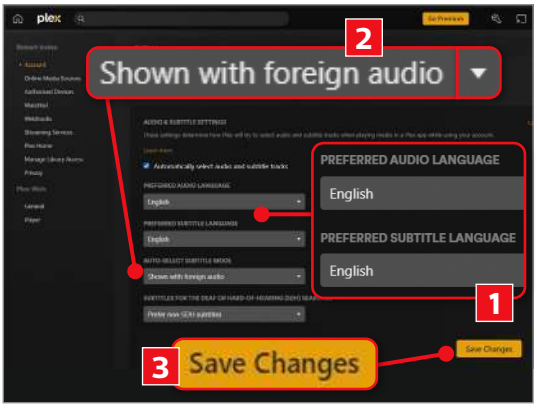
Plex is now available in 195 countries and, as with Netflix and Prime Video, will detect your location to update its channels and content accordingly. This means many shows will be in a foreign language, but you can change its settings to default to English.

Sign into your free Plex account, click the Account icon in the top-right corner of the Plex web player and choose Account Settings. Select 'Language' and set 'English (UK)' as the default language, then click 'Audio & Subtitle Settings'. Select English as your preferred language for audio tracks and subtitles (1 in our screenshot below), and set the latter to be shown automatically for 'foreign audio' 2. Click 'Save Changes' 3 to confirm.

These settings will also be applied to the Plex app for Android (www.snipca.com/55003) and iOS (www.snipca.com/55004), provided you're signed into the same Plex account.

Stream With VPN reveals which shows you can watch on foreign services

Set Plex to use English audio tracks and subtitles for foreign-language shows



DOWNLOAD TV SHOWS TO WATCH OFFLINE

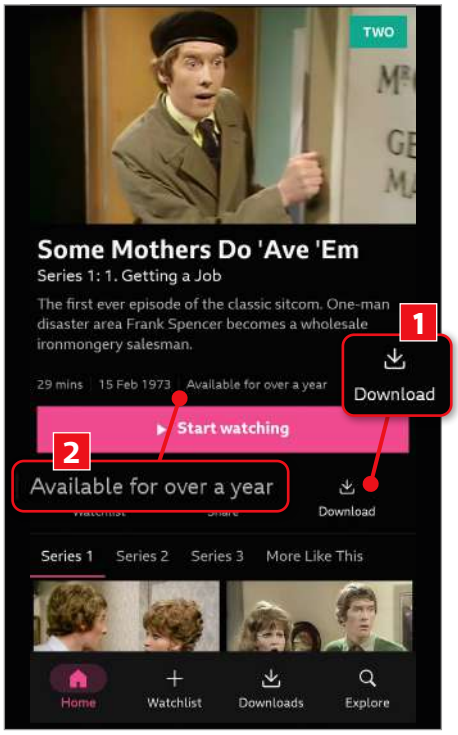
Although streaming is the easiest option for watching TV at home, downloading has several advantages when you're on the move. It means you don't need to rely on having a strong Wi-Fi or mobile signal, and won't get charged for exceeding your monthly data allowance when using 4G or 5G.

You can watch downloaded shows whenever and wherever you want – be it on a plane, the beach or in a campsite. And, unlike streaming, your downloads shouldn't be affected by geo-restrictions, because the files are stored locally for offline playback. However, some services (including Paramount+) warn that downloads may expire if you travel to a different region, so it's best to check before you go.

Download TV shows to your phone or tablet

Many streaming services now let you download TV programmes to your phone or tablet, to watch on the go. You can only play the videos in the service's own app, and they'll expire after a certain number of days (after which you can re-download them), but it's still a very useful feature for travelling.

The BBC iPlayer and Channel 4 apps make it easy to download shows for free, simply by tapping the Download button for an episode (1 in our screenshot above right). There are no limits on how many programmes you can save (though some can't be downloaded for rights reasons), and you usually have at least 30 days to watch them. Lots of BBC series are now available for over a year 2 and the Beeb explicitly says you can watch your downloads outside the UK (www.snipca.com/55011).



Download BBC shows to your phone or tablet to watch on holiday

ITVX is less generous, restricting downloads to its Premium subscription, which costs £5.99 a month. It also appears to have dropped its seven-day free trial to Premium, which was once enough to download a short break's worth of viewing. Despite recently relaunching its mobile app, Channel 5 doesn't let you download its shows, and nor does U.

Most paid-for streaming apps offer the option, including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Now TV and Sky Go Extra, though Netflix's 'Standard with adverts' plan limits you to 15 downloads per month. Pay close attention to expiry times, because although you can keep most shows for 30 days, you often only have 48 hours to watch them once you press play. After that, they'll be deleted from your download library.

Download TV shows to your laptop

The drawback to downloading shows to watch on a phone or tablet is that the screen is much smaller than a TV – plus, you have to either prop up the device or hold it. A laptop provides more comfortable viewing while travelling, but to prevent piracy most streaming services only let you download through their mobile apps.

BBC iPlayer and Netflix stopped offering PC downloads last year, but there are a couple of exceptions. Amazon lets you download TV shows and films through the Prime Video app for Windows (www.snipca.com/55013) – just click the Download button on an episode, season or movie page.

Apple TV+ also supports PC downloads through its Windows app and, like Prime Video, gives you 30 days to watch them offline. You can try Prime Video for free for a month and Apple TV+ for a week, which should be enough to cover your holiday viewing.

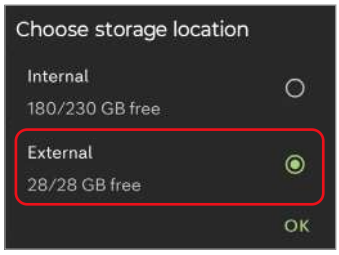
There are a couple of workarounds for downloading BBC programmes to your laptop. One is Get_iPlayer (www.snipca.com/55014), which lets you save BBC shows that were broadcast within the last 30 days – but not archive programmes or box sets. We wrote a workshop about Get_iPlayer in Issue 680 – get it on our 2024 Back Issue CD and USB Stick (see page 34).

The other option is Stacher (www.snipca.com/55015), which can download videos from various services, including iPlayer. Copy and paste the URL of a programme's web page into Stacher's address bar and click the Download button (see screenshot). See our Workshop in Issue 700 (page 38) for more instructions.

Stacher can download videos from various services including iPlayer

Download shows to an SD card

The video files for TV shows can be pretty large – a 30-minute HD programme is about 315MB. To avoid running out of space on your phone or tablet, save downloads to an SD card instead of internal storage, if the app offers that option.



In the Channel 4 app, for example, tap the Settings cog in the top-right corner of the My Shows tab and press 'Storage location'. Select 'External' (see screenshot) to save shows to an SD card.

In the Netflix app, tap the three-line menu on the My Netflix tab and tap App Settings. Choose 'Download Location' and select SD Card.

And in the Prime Video app, go to Settings, then 'Stream & download' and switch on 'Download videos to SD card'.

WATCH TV SHOWS FROM YOUR OWN COLLECTION

As well as the TV shows you watch on streaming services, you may have your own collection of programmes and films stored on your PC. These may have been downloaded from websites such as the Internet Archive, recorded using a PVR or ripped from DVDs.

If you're taking your laptop on holiday, you can obviously bring these shows with you, and watch them offline using a program such as VLC Media Player (www.snipca.com/55070). But what if you're planning to travel light, with only a phone or tablet to hand? Here are some alternative options for enjoying your home entertainment while you're away.

Copy TV shows to a portable drive

You can use an external hard drive, SSD or USB stick to carry hundreds or even thousands of episodes of TV shows, in your pocket, hand luggage or suitcase. Copy the files to a portable drive using File Explorer, then when you get to your hotel or holiday accommodation, connect the device to a USB port on the TV.

Select the drive as the input source (see picture above right) and you'll be able to watch your favourite programmes, just like at home, with no internet connection needed.

However, there may be several restrictions that stop this working.First, your external drive will need to be formatted using a file system supported by the TV. The latest models support FAT32, exFAT and NTFS, but older TVs may only be compatible with FAT32-formatted drives. And, of course, you won't know the model until you get there – it may not even have a USB port.

Second, if any TV shows stored on your drive are protected by DRM, they'll only be

Credit: LG

You may be able to play videos stored on a portable drive on a hotel TV

playable on the device or in the software they were purchased on or downloaded through. The TV may also lack the codecs required to play the video files.

Third, many TVs in hotels and holiday accommodation are special hospitality models with a 'hotel mode'. This prevents guests from changing important settings, including switching the input device to an external drive. You're less likely to encounter this restriction in a private holiday let or Airbnb, but it's still worth bearing in mind.

Because portable drives are so small, it's worth packing them anyway. There are no airline or cruise-ship rules against such devices, though you may need to remove them from your bag when you go through security.

Stream remotely via a media server

Rather than risk a restricted TV ruining your holiday viewing, you can access your home library remotely by setting up a media server. This will stream TV shows to your phone or tablet, or another PC, wherever you are in the world, without being encumbered by geo-restrictions.

The best software for this purpose is Plex Media Server (www.snipca.com/55021), from the company behind the free Plex streaming service we recommended on page 51. Download, install and launch the Windows software (www.snipca.com/55022) to set up your media server – this will open in Plex's web interface.

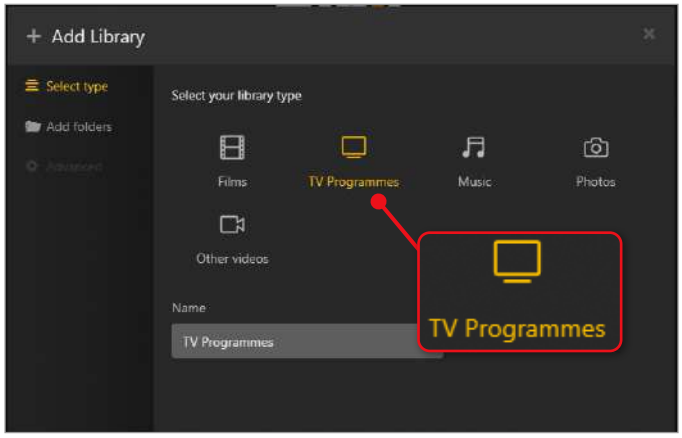
Tick the box to 'Allow me to access my media outside my home'. Click 'Add Library' then TV Programmes (see screenshot below left) and choose 'Browse for Media Folder'. Select the folder containing your TV shows and click Add Library. Click 'Next' then Done to finish setting up your media server and library.

Next, click your Account icon top-right and choose Account Settings then Remote Access. This should say 'Fully accessible outside your network' (1 in our screenshot below). If not, click Enable Remote Access then Retry (see www.snipca.com/55023 for troubleshooting advice).

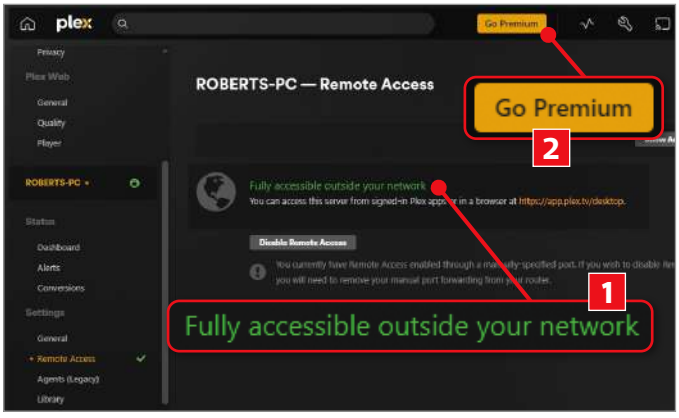
Once this is done, you'll be able to access your media library through the Plex apps for Android and iOS (see page 51 for links), provided they're signed into the same Plex account. You can also access your library in a desktop browser by visiting https://app.plex.tv/desktop. Any videos you add to the folder on your PC will be synced with the library on your media server.

However, to stream TV shows and other videos remotely, you need to buy a Remote Watch Pass (www.snipca.com/55024). Introduced in April, this costs £1.99 a month or £19.99 a year, following a 14-day free trial.

This pass differs from the standard Plex Pass, which costs £4.99 a month and includes lots of extra features, as well as remote streaming and downloading (if you want to save files to watch offline). Click 'Go Premium' 2 to upgrade to one of these passes.



Add your TV programmes to a library hosted on your Plex media server



Plex Media Server lets you stream videos remotely, but it requires a Remote Watch Pass or Plex Pass

Computer active

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To upgrade, visit **www.snipca.com/50563** and click the red **Buy Now** button on the right.

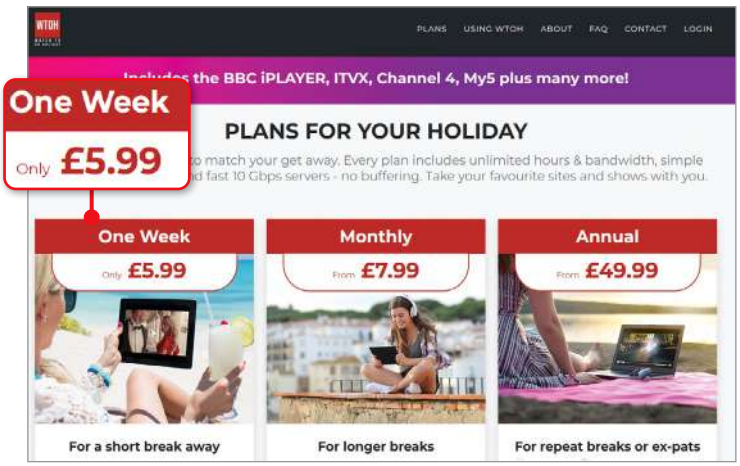
JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **1 July, 2025**.
It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

STREAM UK TV SERVICES FROM OVERSEAS

As we mentioned on page 51, you can't access BBC iPlayer, ITVX, Channel 4 and other UK streaming services when you go abroad. Downloading shows before you go (see page 52) gives you something to watch during your holiday, but you'll miss the latest episodes of your favourite programmes, as well as live events such as football matches.

There are some workarounds that bypass this geo-restriction, but you'll be violating the TV provider's terms of service. If detected, your laptop or mobile device will be blocked and your account may be suspended. Also remember that you need a valid TV licence to stream live UK channels and watch catch-up content on iPlayer.



Watch TV on Holiday' makes it easy to stream UK TV from abroad , with a one-week pass costing £5.99

Stream UK TV services using a VPN

A VPN is the most reliable way to stream UK TV services from abroad. Although the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 identify and block many VPNs, the best VPN providers constantly update their servers to evade detection. Some even specifically mention watching British TV from overseas as one of the main reasons to subscribe (www.snipca.com/55025).

In recent tests by our sister website Tom's Guide (www.snipca.com/55026), NordVPN (www.nordvpn.com) was rated the best option for accessing UK streaming services from abroad. It unblocked iPlayer, ITVX, Channel 4 and the UK Netflix catalogue, from the US. It offers 440 servers in four British cities, and delivers a speedy, stable connection.

NordVPN has apps for Windows, Android and iOS, so you can use it on your laptop, phone or tablet while on holiday. The main catch is the price: it costs £12.23 a month (inc VAT), with no free trial, though this is reduced to £4.66 if you pay for a year's subscription.

If that's a dealbreaker, consider Windscribe instead. This has a free plan (www.snipca.com/55027) with two UK servers, amusingly called London Crumpets (see screenshot right) and London Custard.

Windscribe has two free UK servers for streaming TV from overseas

Windscribe gives you 10GB of free data per month, and has apps for desktop and mobile devices (www.snipca.com/55029). However, some users have found it doesn't always unblock ITVX and Channel 4 from overseas, and occasionally buffers when connecting to iPlayer.

Changing the time zone on your device to GMT (UTC+0), or switching to a different server, can sometimes stop a TV service blocking your VPN. Also try clearing cookies in your browser, if you're trying to access the service's web player.

Pay for a 'TV on holiday' service

Services such as 'Watch TV on Holiday' (www.snipca.com/55071) and 'TV on Holiday' (www.tvonholiday.co.uk) are – as their names suggest – specifically designed to let you watch UK TV from abroad. They offer easy access to iPlayer, ITVX, Channel 4 and other services from anywhere in the world, with a minimum of fuss and configuration.

'TV on holiday' services are essentially VPNs with a TV hat on. You install their software on your laptop, phone or tablet and connect to one of their VPN servers. This gives you a UK IP address, so you can stream your favourite shows from back home without being detected and blocked.

Their main advantage over a standard VPN is that you can pay for a single week or month, rather than committing to a subscription. Both the aforementioned services charge £5.99 for a one-week pass (see screenshot above) and £9.99 for one month, allowing you to choose a plan that suits your holiday duration. There's no limit on how much data you can stream.

'Watch TV on Holiday' has a 3.8-star rating on Trustpilot (www.snipca.com/55032), while 'TV on Holiday' has 4.9 stars (www.snipca.com/55033). It's worth reading the user reviews before you pay for either service.

Fake your location using smart DNS

Another option is to use a smart-DNS tool. Rather than encrypt all your internet traffic and disguise your IP address, like a VPN does, smart DNS only routes your connection to the TV service through a UK server.

This makes it faster than a VPN and less likely to be blocked, because only your location is changed and not your IP address. However, the lack of encryption also means your online activities won't be private – so snoopers may be able to see what you're watching.

You can try Smart DNS Proxy (www.smartdnsproxy.com) for free for 14 days without entering payment-card details (see screenshot below). That may be enough to cover your holiday, and let you watch iPlayer and other services from outside the UK (www.snipca.com/55036). It requires a little configuration, but provides instructions for different devices at www.snipca.com/55038.

BBC iPlayer - How to Watch
14 days free trial. No credit card required.
BBC iPlayer
Reliable 24/7
Access to any Site Worldwide

Smart DNS Proxy fakes your location, but not your IP address

WATCH TV SHOWS USING A STREAMING DEVICE

Take your streaming stick on holiday

Packing an Amazon Fire TV Stick, Google Chromecast or Roku device in your suitcase is a great way to take all your favourite TV shows on holiday with you. Plug the streaming stick into an HDMI port on the TV in your hotel room, cabin or rental accommodation, and set it as the input device. You can then watch TV apps more comfortably and on a bigger screen than on your laptop, phone or tablet. Remember to also pack the stick's remote control and power supply – including a travel adapter, if required.

However, as with portable drives and USB ports (see page 53), you may face the obstacle of the TV's HDMI port being disabled or inaccessible. For example, the set may be wall-mounted with its ports on the back.

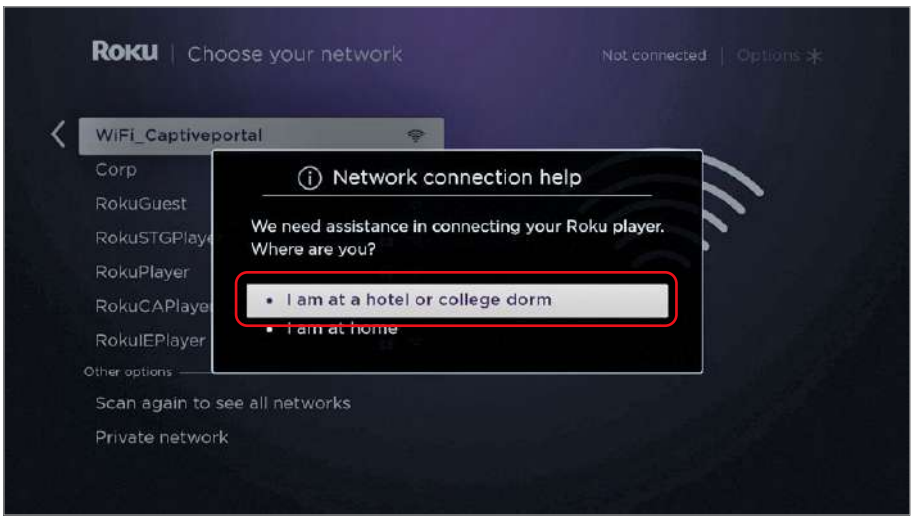
Another hurdle is that streaming sticks require a fast and reliable internet connection, but the Wi-Fi in hotels and holiday lets is often slow and intermittent. You may also need to sign into the Wi-Fi network through a 'captive portal' page, which may not be possible to access from the streaming stick.

To solve the latter problem, some Roku sticks have a handy option called 'Hotel & Dorm Connect' (www.snipca.com/55041), which lets you sign into captive portals from your laptop or mobile device. From the Roku home screen on the TV, go to Settings and select Network, then 'Set up connection'. Select the hotel or holiday-home Wi-Fi network and choose 'I am at a hotel or college dorm' (see screenshot above right). Follow the instructions to complete the setup process on the other device.

On other streaming sticks, you may be able to sign into Wi-Fi through a browser, such as Amazon Silk for Fire TV sticks (www.snipca.com/55043) or TV Bro for the Chromecast and Google TV Streamer (www.snipca.com/55042). When you try to visit a web page, the browser should direct you to the captive portal to agree to terms and log into the Wi-Fi. If not, use the portal URL that appears when you sign in on your phone.

Stream TV reliably with a travel router

One way to ensure you get a strong enough internet connection to stream TV shows in a hotel room (or other holiday accommodation) is to buy a travel router.



Some Roku devices have an option for signing into 'captive portals'

This TP-Link travel router lets you connect devices to its hotspot

This connects to the hotel's Wi-Fi network, then delivers speedy Wi-Fi to any other devices you connect.

Not only is this faster and safer than using the hotel's own Wi-Fi, but it bypasses any restriction on the number of devices your room is permitted to connect to the network. Effectively, you'll only be using one: the travel router itself.

The TP-Link TL-WR1502X (£40 from www.snipca.com/55046) is one of the best value travel routers, with a compact, pocket-sized design and dual-band Wi-Fi 6. Connect your phone, tablet or laptop to the router and ensure the latter is set to use Hotspot mode (pictured above).

Log into the router's settings page at http://192.168.0.1 in your mobile or desktop browser, and select Quick Setup. Follow the instructions at www.snipca.com/55048 to connect the router to the hotel Wi-Fi, sign in through the captive portal (you'll only need to do this once) and share the router's fast internet connection with all your devices – including your streaming stick.

Alternatively, to save buying a travel router, you could turn your phone into a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot and connect your streaming stick to that network. However, this is only advisable if you have an unlimited mobile-data plan and free roaming for your holiday, or else it could cost you a lot of money in data charges. See our feature on page 60 for more advice on this topic.

Install a VPN on your streaming stick

Even after you get your streaming stick working on a hotel or holiday-home TV, there's another restriction that could blight your viewing. As we mentioned on page 51, streaming services such as

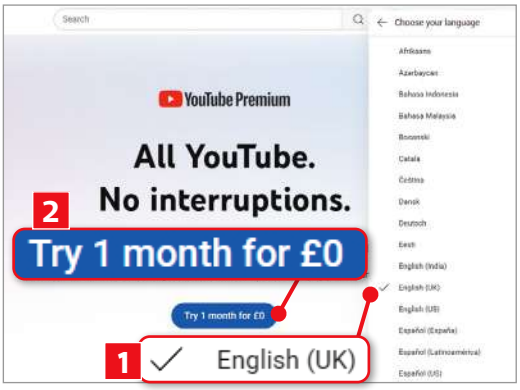
Install a VPN on your streaming stick to unlock UK TV on a big screen

Watch TV on YouTube anywhere

Unlike most streaming services, YouTube's choice of videos – which includes lots of TV programmes – doesn't change dramatically when you travel to another country. Some copyright holders limit which regions their videos are available in, but this won't apply to episodes of TV shows that have been uploaded by YouTube users.

Conversely, you may be able to watch geo-restricted videos that are usually blocked in the UK. Because YouTube's language settings are tied to your profile, it shouldn't switch to using French, Spanish or another lingo when you venture outside the UK.

If that does happen on the YouTube website, click your profile icon, select Language and choose 'English (UK)' (1 in our screenshot right). In the YouTube mobile app, tap the You tab, then the Settings cog and select General. Press 'App language' and choose 'English (United Kingdom)'.



To download YouTube videos so you can watch them offline on holiday, you'll need to pay for YouTube Premium (www.snipca.com/55061). This costs £12.99 a month, but its one-month free trial 2 may be enough to cover your trip.

Alternatively, you can use Stacher (see page 52) to download YouTube videos for free to your laptop.

Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+, will automatically switch to their regional versions when you're in a different country, while UK services won't be available at all. You can easily fix this problem by installing a VPN on your streaming stick. Windscribe (see page 55) has free apps for Fire TV (www.snipca.com/55050) and Google TV (www.snipca.com/55051), which let you access UK services on a big screen.

Select 'United Kingdom' in Windscribe's country list and connect to one of the free London servers (see screenshot below left). You should now be able to access UK streaming libraries rather than overseas ones. If not, restart your streaming stick, and try disconnecting from, then reconnecting to Wi-Fi.

The Cello C2224WSH portable smart TV gives you a huge choice of viewing while on the move

Buy a portable smart TV for travelling

If you're planning to spend your holiday in a caravan, camper van or motorhome, you have the flexibility to take a smart TV with you, rather than rely on a phone, tablet or laptop. This means you can watch shows on a decent-sized screen, and – presuming you're staying in the UK and your van has Wi-Fi set up – watch live Freeview channels and shows on-demand wherever you go.

The Cello C2224WSH (£159 from www.snipca.com/55053, pictured above) strikes a great balance between features and price. It has a 22in screen and is powered by LG's webOS, giving you access to all the main streaming services and other smart TV apps. It also includes Freeview Play (shown above), so you can switch between live and catch-up TV, Freesat for satellite channels, USB and HDMI ports, and Bluetooth.

The TV's 12V battery lets you charge it from your van's 12V system, while its Perfect Pitch Sound speaker system offers immersive audio. A 19in model with a built-in DVD player, the Cello C1924WSF, is available for £229 (www.snipca.com/55055).

If those sets are too expensive, consider turning a a portable 'dumb' TV into a smart one by inserting a streaming stick in its HDMI port. Many TV apps let you cast their content from your Android phone or tablet to a Chromecast or Fire TV Stick, or you can mirror your small screen on the larger one. ca

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Don't Pay For Mobile Roaming

Fed up with being ripped off by roaming fees? **Jonathan Parkyn** explains how to use your mobile phone abroad without letting your bill roam wild

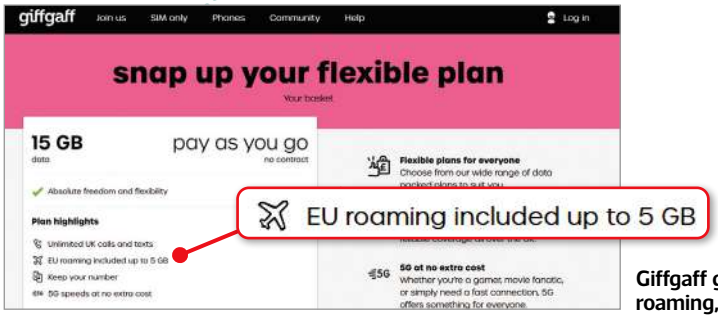
Using your mobile phone abroad just got even more confusing this summer, after EU members rejected the UK's bid to drop roaming charges for British holidaymakers during recent Brexit 'reset' talks.

Roaming fees are imposed by your mobile-network provider to cover the cost of using international mobile networks while you're abroad. They were abolished for UK visitors to European countries in 2017 but were subsequently reintroduced in 2021 when Britain left the EU.

The current status is muddled, with some UK mobile providers charging fees and others offering free or capped services for travellers within the EU. And if you're travelling beyond Europe, roaming costs can vary wildly. It's easy to get caught out and incur roaming fees without realising, only to discover you've been hit with a hefty bill upon your return. But there are ways to save money or even avoid these costs altogether.

Check existing charges and look for cheaper deals

Before you do anything else, find out your current mobile provider's roaming policy. It should offer a clear explanation of how its fees work. A good example is Vodafone's Roaming Charge Checker (www.snipca.com/55005), which lets you input your destination, device and plan to see how much you'll be charged for using your mobile on your trip.



Giffgaff gives you free EU roaming, but only up to 5GB

There's nothing stopping you from temporarily using a SIM card from a network that offers cheaper or free roaming. It's even easier if your device supports dual SIMs or eSIMs (see below). If your phone is locked to your current mobile network, you'll need to contact your provider and request for your device to be unlocked.

There are lots of cheap pay-as-you-go (PAYG) SIM-only deals that either include roaming or allow you to include it as an add-on. For example, O2's cheapest SIM-only deal (£10) gives you 8GB of data and unlimited calls and texts, whether you're in the UK or in Europe (www.snipca.com/55006). Just remember that you'll be charged £3.50 per gigabyte (GB) if you exceed your plan's data allowance – and that O2 caps free EU roaming at 25GB, so it's not worth paying for a plan with more data than that.

Several Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs) also offer free roaming in Europe, including Asda Mobile, Giffgaff and Tesco Mobile. Some deals are cheaper than O2's – Giffgaff's cheapest PAYG deal gives you 15GB of data for £10, for instance. Bear in mind, though, that Giffgaff caps free EU roaming at 5GB (see screenshot above). You'll end up paying 20p per MB if you go over this, even within your 15GB plan.

Things are more complicated if you're travelling outside the EU. The UK's main four networks (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone) all offer international roaming plans, but these tend to be pricey (£5 to £15 a day). That said, it's worth checking to see whether your current plan includes any roaming among its perks. Customers on O2's Plus or Ultimate plans, for example, get free roaming within several non-EU countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US.

Get a travel or local SIM

Some UK networks and MVNOs (including Lebara, Lyca Mobile, iD Mobile and Smarty) offer cheap international roaming options. Lebara's SIM-only

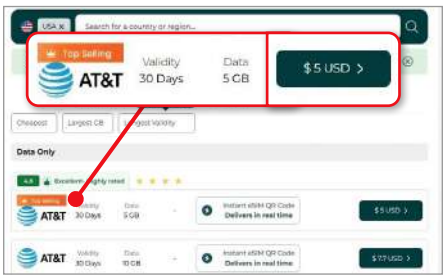
deals, for example, start at just £5 for 5GB, which includes free roaming in both the EU and India. You have to pay extra for roaming in other destinations, but prices are fairly competitive – starting at just £5 for eight days in the US, for instance, with 2GB of data (www.snipca.com/55007).

Another option is using a SIM-only deal from a provider based in the country you're visiting, which is often one of the cheapest ways to stay connected abroad (as you're only paying local rates for calls and data) and suits those who frequently travel to the same country. Bear in mind that some countries require photo ID when registering a SIM card and that activation and usage notifications will be in the local language.

Also consider that your local SIM will have its own international phone numbers, so any calls you make to the UK may be charged at higher rates. It's usually preferable to use local SIMs on dual-SIM devices, so you can keep your UK SIM active.

What about an eSIM?

As we noted back in Issue 697 (page 62), eSIMs are growing in popularity because they let you switch between mobile networks and data plans on the go, without having to replace physical cards. You'll need a phone that supports eSIMs. Most that do also offer dual-SIMs, letting you have two phone numbers or data plans active simultaneously on the same phone.



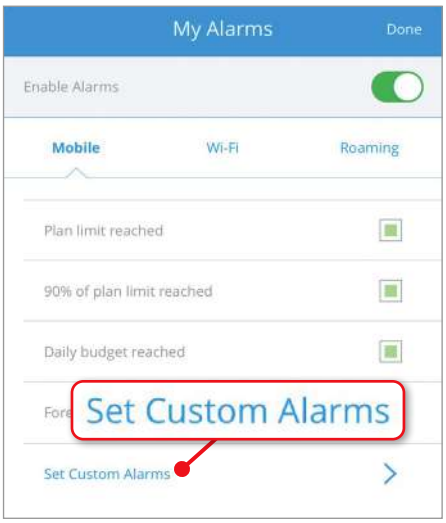
Compare eSIMs at Airhub, which lists 5GB data-only US deals from just $5

The big benefit for international travellers is that you can find cheap deals for the country you're visiting and set up your phone before you go. Most UK networks offer eSIM plans, but you'll find even cheaper deals by visiting sites like Airhub (www.airhubapp.com), which let you compare and buy local, regional and global eSIM plans.

For example, travellers heading to the US can currently opt for a 5GB data-only eSIM plan from AT&T for just $5 (around £3.75 – see screenshot above). Different eSIM providers get access to different deals from local networks, so it's worth comparing what's on offer for your destination at Ubigi (www.ubigi.com), Nomad (www.getnomad.app), and AloSIM (https://alosim.com), among others.

Monitor your data usage

There are ways to monitor usage so you don't crash through your data limit. On Android, tap Settings, 'Network & Internet', SIMs, 'Data warning and limit', then enable both 'Set data warning' and 'Set data limit', stipulating at what point (in GBs) you want to receive a low-data warning, and at what point you want to disable data usage altogether.



Install 'My Data Manager' on your iPhone to receive "alarms" when you near your data limit

Unfortunately, iOS doesn't support automatic data alerts, but you can tap Settings, then Mobile Service and look under Current Period to see how much data you've used. Tapping 'Reset Statistics' at the bottom just before you arrive at your destination will reset the data counter to zero, so you can keep track of it.

You can also install the third-party app My Data Manager (www.snipca.com/55002, see screenshot above) to set alerts (or "alarms") when you're nearing your data limit. Check the box left for ways to restrict data usage.

Use Wi-Fi instead

The cheapest way to use your phone abroad is to avoid using mobile data altogether, and rely instead on free Wi-Fi in your accommodation or public hotspots when you need to access the internet or use online services. Most messaging apps, including WhatsApp, Signal and iMessage, work over Wi-Fi.

If your phone supports Wi-Fi calling, you may even be able to make voice calls without the need for a mobile connection – though some UK networks (including Giffgaff and Tesco Mobile) block Wi-Fi calling when abroad.

You can enable Wi-Fi calling under Settings, Mobile Data in iOS, or by tapping Settings, 'Network & Internet', Mobile Network or 'Calls and SMS' on an Android device. Here, you'll also find the option to switch roaming off or disable mobile data completely – well worth doing if you want to avoid accidental charges. ca

Stop your phone devouring data

Download offline maps
Downloading offline maps to your phone lets you search locations, view routes and navigate via GPS, without using mobile data. Google Maps and Apple Maps both let you do this.

Disable 'Background App Refresh'
Temporarily preventing apps from using mobile data in the background can lower data usage. On an iPhone, tap Settings, General, Background App Refresh, then tap Background App Refresh at the top of the list of apps and select Wi-Fi (or turn it off altogether). On some Android models you can block background data usage by enabling Data Saver (under Settings, 'Network & Internet', Use Data Saver – see screenshot). Otherwise you can block individual apps by tapping Settings, Apps, then 'All apps'. Tap an app, then tap 'Mobile data and Wi-Fi' and turn 'Background data' off.

Turn off Wi-Fi Assist
Many phones automatically switch to mobile data when the Wi-Fi signal is weak. To switch this off on an iPhone, tap Settings, then Mobile Service and disable Wi-Fi Assist.

With Android devices, this setting can vary depending on your make and model. On Pixel phones, it's called 'Adaptive connectivity' (under Settings, then 'Network & Internet'). On Samsung devices, it's known as Smart Network Search or Intelligent Wi-Fi (usually found under Settings, Connections, Wi-Fi, then More).

Buy a refurbished monitor

Don't pay for a new screen when you can get a top-quality model for half the price. **Robert Irvine** explains why and where you should buy a refurbished monitor

If you're looking to upgrade your current monitor or create a dual-screen setup, you don't need to spend hundreds of pounds on a new model. Buying a refurbished monitor has many advantages and there are fewer risks compared with other devices.

LCD monitors have no moving parts or flash memory, which means they don't wear out and don't have limited lifespans like hard drives or SSDs. The only important thing is that their screen still works properly. Here we explain why you should buy refurbished, what to look for and where to get the best deals.

WHY BUY A REFURBISHED MONITOR?

The biggest advantage to buying a refurbished monitor is that you'll save a lot of money on the price of a new one – generally between 30 and 50 per cent. This means you can get one with a larger screen and better specifications than you'd typically be able to afford – or you might want to maximise your discount by choosing a basic model.

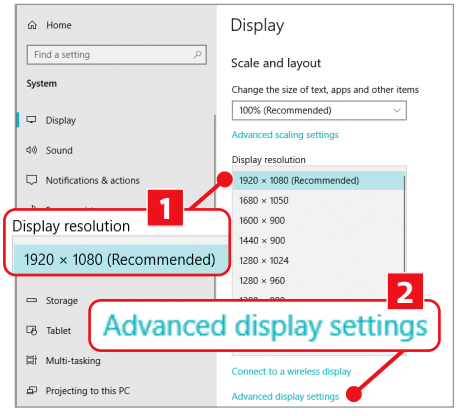
Buying refurbished helps the environment, by giving a second life to an existing monitor and reducing electronic waste. Display technology changes more slowly than most hardware, so even a monitor that originally went on sale several years ago won't be outdated. It's also a cost-effective way to add a second screen to your PC setup.

Unlike second-hand monitors, refurbished models are thoroughly cleaned, tested and repaired by reputable sellers. This fixes problems such as dead pixels, faulty colours and other defects, so the monitor works as good as new. Retailers grade the conditions of refurbished devices, so you know exactly what you're paying for.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A REFURBISHED MONITOR

Resolution and refresh rate

There are loads of refurbished monitors with a 4K Ultra HD resolution and a refresh rate of 144GHz or higher, which provide an ultra-sharp picture with very smooth motion. But unless you use your PC for gaming or professional photo or video editing, 4K is likely to be more than you need and a cheaper, Full HD (1080p) or – if you spot a bargain – Quad HD (1440p) model will be sufficient.



Check your PC's resolution to ensure it will support a new monitor

In addition, your PC's graphics card will need to support 4K resolution and a high refresh rate to justify buying a refurbished monitor with those specifications. To check what your PC can handle, open the Settings app and choose System, then Display.

Click the 'Display resolution' dropdown menu to see the maximum resolution available – on our laptop this is 1920x1080 pixels (see 1 in our screenshot below left). You can check the maximum refresh rate by clicking 'Advanced display settings' 2.

TN or IPS panel

Monitors with TN (twisted nematic) LCD panels have higher response times and refresh rates, making them popular for gaming, have but narrower viewing angles and less accurate colours. IPS (in-place switching) monitors, with wider viewing angles and more accurate colours, are better for everyday use and usually cost less – whether new or refurbished.

Sometimes even cheaper are monitors with VA (vertical alignment) panels, which offer accurate colours and high contrast, but have narrow viewing angles. This can make your screen look washed out when viewed from one side.

Display inputs and ports

Most monitors connect to your PC via HDMI, but more expensive refurbished models may also have DisplayPort connectivity, which allows for higher

Buy direct from the manufacturer

Several hardware manufacturers have refurbished or outlet stores, which sell non-new versions of their products for bargain prices. Sadly, in the UK at least, the only company to include monitors is Dell, through its excellent Outlet store (www.snipca.com/54987).

This lists dozens of refurbished monitors, which Dell has fully tested, restored and certified itself. Some models have never been used, but were returned by customers or retailers who overstocked.

Dell offers free delivery and a three-year warranty on all refurbished monitors, plus free 14-day returns.

When we visited, there were several Full HD monitors for under £100, including the Dell SE2722H (pictured)

resolutions and refresh rates. Check if your computer has a port labelled DisplayPort or DP to see if you can upgrade your picture quality.

If your PC is quite old and still uses VGA or DVI, you should be able to find a refurbished monitor that supports those standards. Also check the listing for USB ports if you usually connect your mouse, keyboard or webcam directly to your monitor.

Warranty and returns

Any reputable retailer should provide a warranty for your refurbished monitor, though the length may vary by model, condition and age. Some warranties are as short as 90 days, but you should try to get one of at least 12 months. Also check the store's returns policy, in case the monitor doesn't meet your expectations.

WHERE TO BUY A REFURBISHED MONITOR

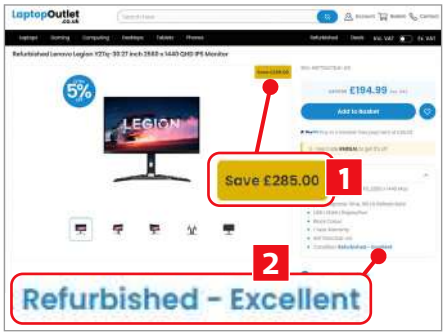
Laptop Outlet

www.snipca.com/54980

Laptop Outlet has a great selection of refurbished monitors (over 70 when we visited), from well-known brands including Lenovo, Samsung and Asus. You can browse models by condition (Excellent, Open Box, Good and 'Manufacturer Certified Refurbished') and specifications including display type (resolution), screen size, refresh rate and connectivity.

Laptop Outlet's warranties are for at least one year and delivery is free on orders over £150. On our visit, it was offering additional discounts of five or 10 per cent on top of its usual bargain prices.

The Refurbished Monitors section at Box (www.snipca.com/54988) also offers some brilliant deals, and specialises in open-box models that have never been used.



Laptop Outlet saved us £285 on this refurbished Lenovo monitor

BEST BARGAIN

Lenovo Legion Y27q-30

£195 from www.snipca.com/54981

Saving us £285 on the recommended retail price (1 in our screenshot above), including free delivery, this refurbished Lenovo monitor boasts a Quad HD (2560x1440 pixels), 27in screen and is in Excellent condition 2.

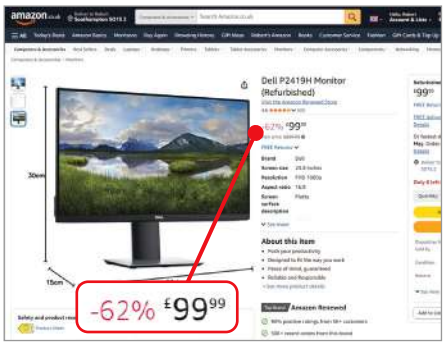
Amazon Renewed

www.snipca.com/54982

Selling a wide range of "refurbished products you can trust", Amazon Renewed is a reliable place to buy cut-price monitors. We spotted models from big names such as Dell, HP and Samsung, with many priced under £100.

All monitors labelled Renewed or Refurbished have been "professionally inspected, tested and cleaned to be fully functional", and either come in their original packaging or a new cardboard box. They're also covered by Amazon's one-year guarantee.

Make sure you check the condition before purchasing – this should be above the price in the top-right corner. This ranges from Acceptable condition ("may have a small number of scratches") to Premium ("no signs of cosmetic damage"), with prices to match.



Amazon Renewed gave us a 62-per-cent discount on this Dell monitor

BEST BARGAIN

Dell P2419H

£100 from www.snipca.com/54983

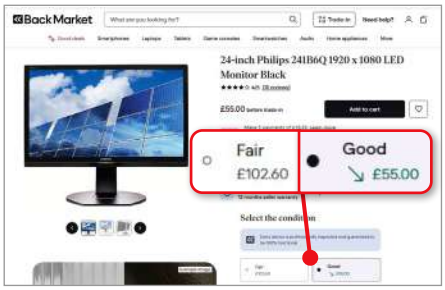
Costing 62 per cent (£160) less than its new price (see screenshot above), this refurbished Dell monitor has a Full HD, 24in screen and a 4.6-star customer rating. Stock was running out fast when we last viewed it.

Back Market

www.snipca.com/54985

Although Back Market's Refurbished Monitors section is tucked away under Laptops/'Peripherals and accessories', it's packed with bargains. Browse by price, brand, screen size, resolution and other criteria, and read honest reviews from customers before you buy.

Choose between Fair, Good and Excellent conditions, depending on how much you want to save and how bothered you are about scratches. Delivery is free and Back Market offers free 30-day returns and a one-year warranty, though it does add a small Quality Assurance Fee to your order.



This Philips monitor costs less in Good condition than it does in Fair

BEST BARGAIN

Philips 241B6Q

£55 from www.snipca.com/54986

Curiously, this Philips monitor currently costs less in Good condition than it does in Fair (see screenshot above). It has a 24in 1080p screen, but – as one reviewer points out – doesn't have an HDMI input, only DisplayPort, VGA and DVI. ca

Problems Solved

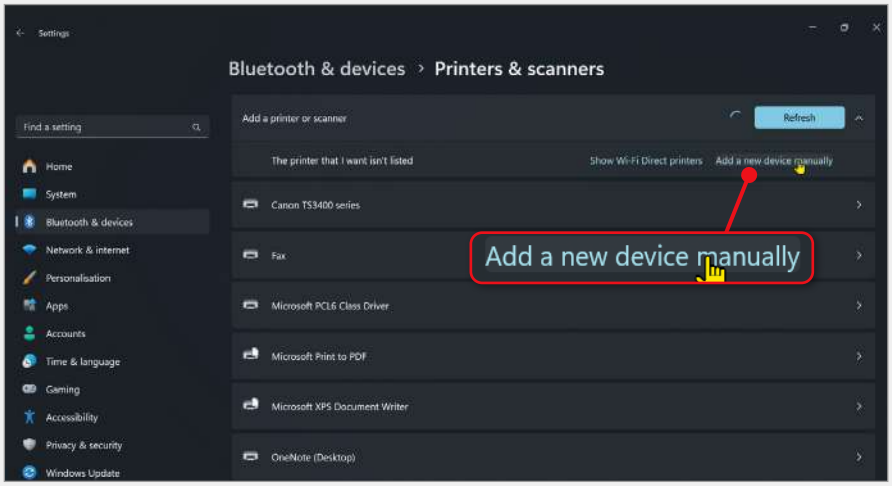
Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why can't I print from my Surface Pro?

Q I recently bought a Microsoft Surface Pro 11 laptop-tablet and a Canon TR7650 printer. After much to and fro with Canon, its support staff told me this printer model is incompatible with the Surface Pro 11. This is because the Surface Pro has an an AMD processor and the printer only works with 'x86-type' processors. I'm very unhappy with this. Canon did not seem concerned that I had spent a lot of money on something that does not work, despite saying on the website that it supports Windows 11. I'm hoping you can suggest a fix or maybe an explanation as to why this is the case. It looks like a more general problem that I've learned about the hard way.

Ian Brighton



To use Microsoft's generic printer drivers, click this link in 'Printer & scanners' settings...

A First, let's clear up the processor type inside your Surface Pro 11, which is a Snapdragon unit. This is an ARM-based chip, made by a company called Qualcomm, and has nothing to do with AMD – but it's easy to mix up ARM and AMD.

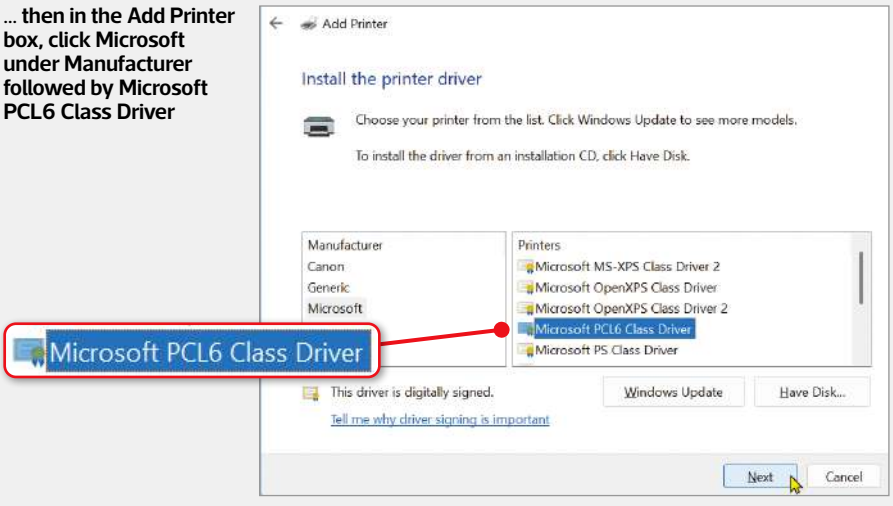
Processors that use an ARM design are not the same as those made by Intel and AMD for PCs, which were originally based on the x86 architecture (named after the Intel 8086 processor, released in the 1970s). So, while Microsoft now has made an ARM-based version of Windows 11, not all Windows apps and tools are compatible with it – and this is the situation you're hitting up against.

Basically, Canon has not yet made ARM-compatible drivers for its printers. It is not alone in this, because many manufacturers adopt a wait-and-see approach. This is likely to improve over time, as hardware and software companies update their tools to work with Windows on ARM.

But, that's not much consolation in the here and now. The solution is to make use of the generic drivers made by Microsoft, and built into Windows. These won't give you access to all the features you might find in dedicated drivers, but they should at least give you the ability to print.

First, in Windows 11, click the Start button followed by the Settings cog, and then 'Bluetooth & devices' followed by 'Printers & scanners'. Next, click the 'Add device' button, wait for a moment while Windows scans for new printers, then click the 'Add a new device manually link' (see screenshot above). Now, in the Add Printer box, click Microsoft followed by Microsoft PCL6 Class Driver (see screenshot left), then click Next. Give the printer a different name (optional), then click Next followed by Finished.

Hopefully, you can now print via this generic driver. If not, there's one more setting to tweak. Back at the 'Printers & scanners' page in Settings, click the Microsoft PCL6 Class Driver entry and then click 'Printer properties'. In the Properties box that opens, click to select the Advanced tab. Finally, next to Driver, click to open the dropdown menu and choose Microsoft IPP Class Driver before clicking OK. You should now be able to print.



... then in the Add Printer box, click Microsoft under Manufacturer followed by Microsoft PCL6 Class Driver

How do I make Microsoft Money run on Windows 11?

Q I have a new Windows 11 Pro PC that I had custom-built to my specification. I've been using Microsoft Money for 25 years on various computers without any problems – until now. I've tried everything I know, but I can't get it to work on my new Windows 11 Pro machine. My wife has a Windows 11 Home laptop and I have another (mini) PC running Windows 11 Pro, and it works on both of these. It's Money 2003, by the way. Any ideas?

Malcolm Otter

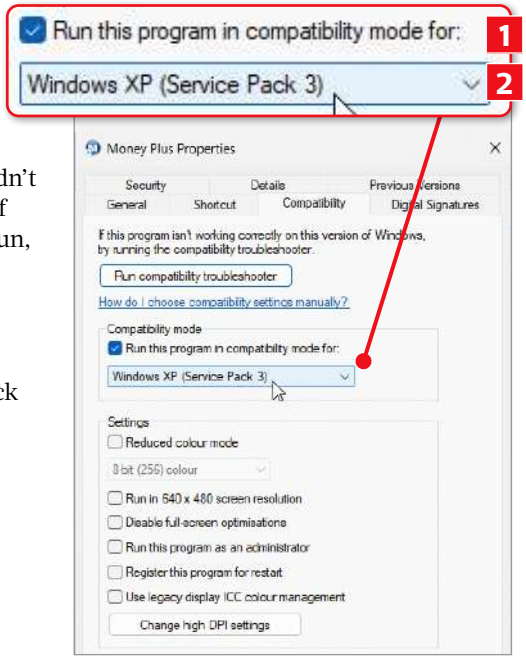
A Support for Money 2003 ended 20 years ago, so there will be no solutions forthcoming from Microsoft. Moreover, old software like this might have security flaws that make it unsafe to use.

But putting those issues aside, we do know that Money can work in Windows 11 because we've made it work ourselves. Indeed, you have apparently managed to get it working on two other Windows 11 PCs of your own. So, while you didn't tell us which specific problems or errors you encountered on your custom-built system, it's likely that some specific aspect of this PC is the problem. That could be down to hardware or software.

There's not much that be can done about a hardware clash, short of replacing components – but we can't imagine you'd want to do that. You didn't tell us what you've already tried, but if Money managed to install but won't run, try enabling compatibility mode.

To do this, first use File Explorer to navigate to the installation folder, possibly at **C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft Money 2003**, then right-click the 'msmoney.exe' program file (or shortcut) before choosing Properties. Next, click to select the Compatibility tab and in the 'Compatibility mode' section, tick the 'Run this program in compatibility mode for' box (**1** in our screenshot), then open the dropdown menu before choosing 'Windows XP (Service Pack 3)' **2**. Click OK to save the change.

If installation is the problem, then briefly disable whatever security software you have running on your PC – as such tools can sometimes disrupt Money's setup. To disable Windows Security, for example, click Start followed by the Settings cog, then 'Privacy & security' followed by Windows Security. Next, click 'Virus & threat protection' and under the 'Virus & threat protection' heading, click 'Manage settings'. Now switch off the 'Real-time protection' slider.



Enable compatibility mode by ticking this box (1) then choosing the relevant Windows XP Service Pack (2)

Can 'Have I Been Pwned?' be trusted with our passwords?

Q You often mention the website Have I Been Pwned? (HIBP?, https://haveibeenpwned.com). While I feel comfortable using the service, seeing the recent phishing attack on its users has raised some obvious doubts. It's one thing checking email-address leaks, but it seems potentially another level of risk to checking passwords. How vulnerable might we be when entering these details on this site, now or in the future? It's reassuring to learn that an email or password hasn't been compromised, but it would be ironic if typing them into HIBP? exposes them.

Will Gortoa

Have I Been Pwned? uses a process called hashing to protect your password, but there are still security risks

A Great question. HIBP? uses a process called hashing to protect your password. This means your password is scrambled (hashed), and only the hashed version is compared against HIBP?'s vast database of breached passwords. If a match is found, HIBP? can tell you it's been exposed – without 'seeing' the actual password itself. Once the check is complete, the hash is discarded. So HIBP? doesn't see or store any password data. This process is explained in detail by Troy Hunt – the man behind HIBP? – on his blog at www.snipca.com/54753.

That said, there are risks: HIBP? could potentially be hacked, or a fake version of the site could trick people into entering their passwords. In those cases, yes, passwords could be exposed. However, even if your password is on a breach list, it's not immediately useful to attackers unless they also know the associated username or have other context. So, as a rule of thumb, avoid checking both email address and passwords at the same time. See page 11 for details of HIBP?'s new look (pictured).

Why is my OneDrive stuck?

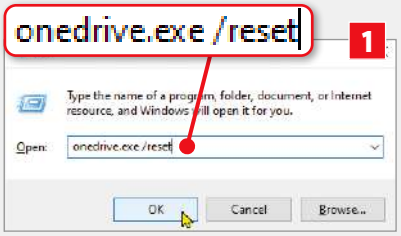
Q I've been using OneDrive for years without any problems but, recently, my files haven't been syncing properly – I just see a message that says 'sync pending'. Restarting my PC doesn't help. Everything else on my PC is working fine, including all online stuff. What do you think?

James Whitaker

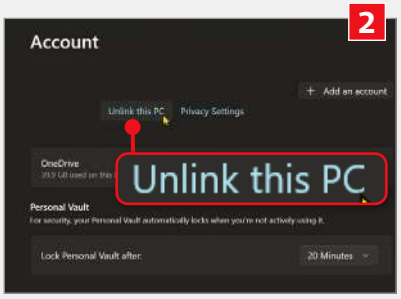
A It's difficult to say what might be causing this, but it does sound like a glitch that's isolated to OneDrive. The tool does have a little-known reset option that can fix all manner of quirks, so we'd suggest trying that.

First, press Windows key+R to open the Run box, then type onedrive.exe /reset (see screenshot 1) before clicking OK. OneDrive will close itself and – after a few moments – restart automatically.

If this doesn't fix it, try temporarily unlinking your OneDrive account from your PC. In OneDrive's Settings, click the Account followed by 'Unlink this PC' 2, and confirm by clicking 'Unlink account'. Wait a short while and then just sign back in.



Reset OneDrive by typing this into the Run box and clicking OK



Alternatively, try unlinking your OneDrive account from your PC

Why do my colour cartridges run out when I print only in mono?

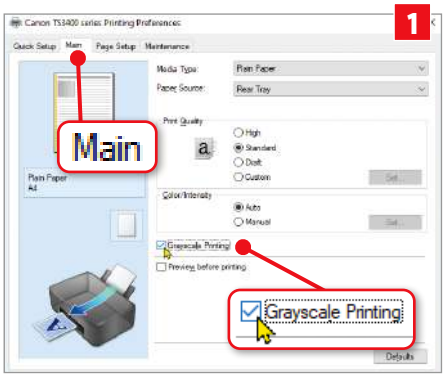
Q My Canon TS6000 printer uses three colour and two black ink tanks. I don't understand why, even when I print only in black, the colour cartridges seem to run out of ink just as fast as the black. Is this normal? Is there a fix?

Doug Makinson

A It's quite common, yes. There are multiple causes. First, unless you instruct your printer to print using only the black ink tanks, colour ink will typically be used. This seems counter-intuitive, but this blending can produce 'darker' blacks. The amount of colour the printer uses is affected by both quality settings and the selected paper type – 'black' printed on photo paper, for example, tends to draw on more colour ink.

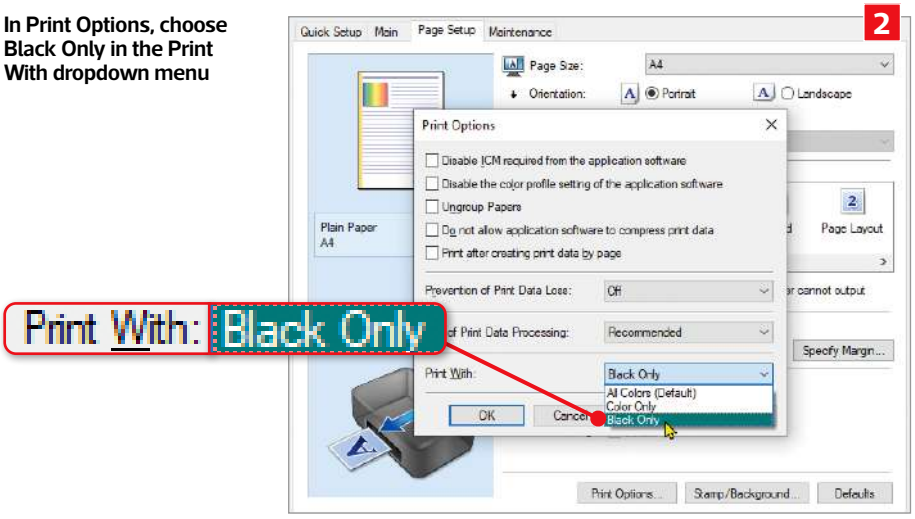
Managing the print options is one way to minimise the use of colour ink. In the Canon Printing Preferences box, for example, ticking the Grayscale Printing box on the Main tab (see screenshot 1) will limit ink drawn from the black (BK) and pigment black (PGBK) tanks. Next, flip to the Page Setup tab and click the Print Options button. Then, next to Print With, click to open the dropdown menu and choose Black Only 2.

Finally, remember that inkjet printers routinely run cleaning cycles that expel ink from all installed tanks. There's no single, reliable way to stop this, but you can minimise these cycles by avoiding switching the printer off, and running a simple print job every few days – reining in the printer's programmed desire to flush its nozzles.



Minimise the use of colour ink by ticking the Grayscale Printing box in Printing Preferences

In Print Options, choose Black Only in the Print With dropdown menu



Q: How do I wipe my dead iPad?

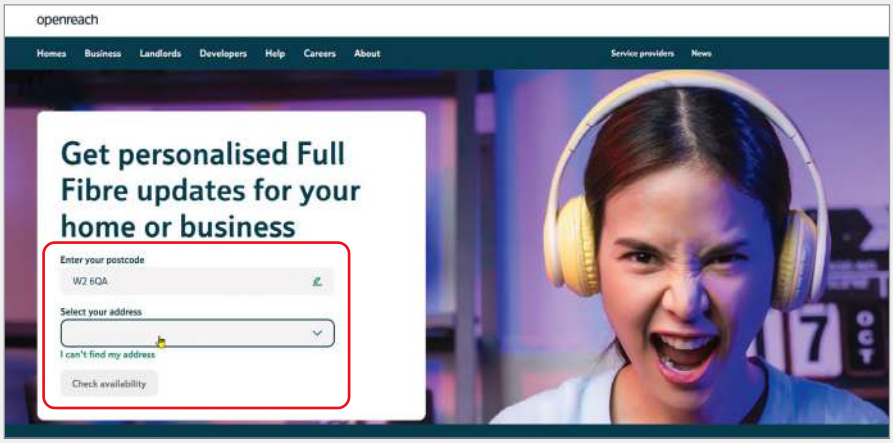
A: Issue 694, page 67 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

How do I keep my landline number when switching to fibre broadband?

Q I need to change my broadband connection from copper to fibre for speed requirements. However, losing my existing landline number will be a problem before the switch-off in 2027. Can you tell me if any supplier would let me keep my phone number for the next two years?

Ed Mitchell

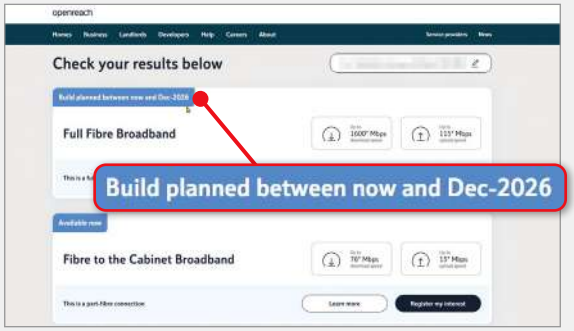


Enter your postcode and house address in Openreach's website...

A With very few exceptions, you should be able to switch from copper to fibre and keep your existing landline number. This is something you can do immediately, and it's not prevented by the upcoming copper network switch-off – currently scheduled for January 2027. In fact, if you want to keep your number, it's wise to act before then.

There are a couple of exceptions. One is if you're considered a vulnerable customer who still relies on equipment that uses the old analogue (copper) landline network – such as personal alarms or healthcare devices. In this case, your provider should work with you to ensure continued service. You should contact them before switching.

Another exception is where digital voice services (the new phone systems that run over broadband) aren't yet available locally. However, this tends to apply in areas that also lack access to fibre broadband. In short, if fibre is available to you, it's likely that digital voice is too. You can check fibre availability in your area via the Openreach rollout map at www.snipca.com/55012 (see screenshots).



...to check whether fibre broadband is available in your area

Your main concern seems to be about losing your number by switching now – but almost all major providers (such as BT) offer a digital voice service that lets you keep your existing number. The only change is that your phone will plug into your router via an adapter, rather than the old BT-style wall socket.

Do I need a £1,000 laptop for downloading BBC TV?

Q We've been using an old HP Spectre x360 laptop to download BBC programmes, via get_iplayer (www.snipca.com/54970) and Amazon Prime. This has been convenient when on holiday in our campervan, because we could just place the laptop on our counter top when watching it and the downloads avoided the need for internet access, which can be patchy or non-existent.

Unfortunately, the laptop has developed a fault. Given that it won't run Windows 11, I doubt a repair is worth it. If we were to buy a new laptop it would probably need a 15in screen due to the distance the counter is away from the bed. I really don't want to spend £1,000 as the laptop would only be used for this. Are there other viable solutions?

Graham Harwood

A While Prime Video and other streaming services, including BBC iPlayer itself, will run on any modern tablet, get_iplayer requires a computer running Windows, macOS or Linux – so you definitely need another laptop.

Problems Solved isn't the place for in-depth product reviews, but you certainly don't need to spend £1,000 to run Windows 11 or get_iplayer. Pretty much all the big-name laptop manufacturers offer very basic Windows 11 models that retail for around the £200 mark, some with 15in screens.

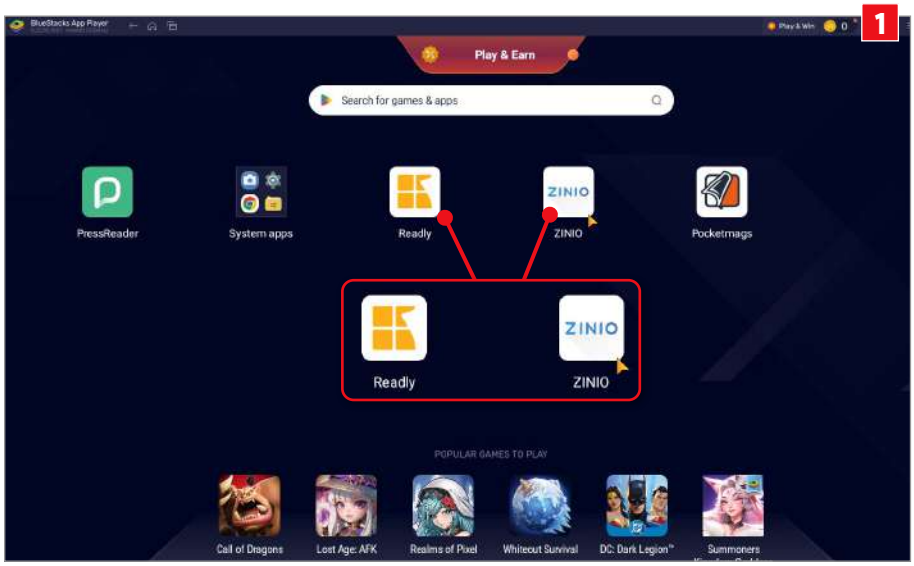
Purely as an example, the pictured Acer Aspire 3 is unlikely to win any awards for performance or specifications, but it includes Windows 11, has a 15.6in screen and will let you continue using get_iplayer. At around £229 (www.snipca.com/54755), it would be fine for your specific purpose.

The £229 Acer Aspire 3's 15in screen is ideal for watching downloaded movies and TV shows

Why does BlueStacks emulator not work on my PC?

Q Is there any difference between the Android operating system on the emulator BlueStacks and the Android on mobile phones. When I contacted a digital magazine's customer services recently, they told me an app I've been using for over a year will no longer work on a PC or laptop. They claim it's because they have "changed the platform". Is it possible that an app can distinguish between a PC running BlueStacks and a smartphone running Android? Or am I just being fobbed off because they can't find an error in my setup?

Vic Strong



1

Digital-reader apps such as Readly and Zinio work perfectly in the BlueStacks Android emulator on a PC

A Software developers can use various technical tricks to find out what devices their Android apps are running on, whether it's a real phone or an emulator such as BlueStacks. So the short answer to your question is yes, it's possible that a change of publishing platform has led to this.

2

***Computeractive* is one of the many magazines available to digital readers in Zinio**

You didn't tell us the name of the magazine or which digital-reader platform it uses, but if the publisher has switched to a different reader app, that will be the root cause of your problem.

If an app refuses to run in an emulator such as BlueStacks, it may be due to licensing issues and is probably beyond the magazine staff's control. However, the title's publisher will have chosen to use this particular reader platform. There are plenty of digital-reader apps that run happily in BlueStacks, such as Readly (www.snipca.com/54756) and Zinio (www.snipca.com/54757, see screenshot 1), and you can read *Computeractive* 2 in both, so we'd suggest lobbying the company to switch to one of those instead.

Can I use a slim laptop for gaming?

Q I'm looking to buy a new laptop for gaming and general use. All the gaming laptops I've seen look bulky and ugly to me, while slimmer, supposedly 'non-gaming' laptops seem to offer similar specifications. Could I buy one of these and still play games on it?

James Randall

A Two key factors behind the design of gaming laptops are thermal management and style. The bold aesthetics are a matter of taste, but the extra bulk also allows more room for cooling fans, heat sinks and air vents to keep high-performance graphics cards running efficiently.

A slimmer, sleeker laptop might offer similar (or even better) specs on paper, but without robust cooling, it may reduce or 'throttle' its performance when the temperatures rise.

This can affect gameplay noticeably, so the real question is whether you prioritise sustained performance for serious gaming, or you're happy with a more stylish machine that can handle games occasionally but might not always give you full power under pressure. They can be expensive though - the Alienware m18 R2 (pictured) costs £2,399 from www.snipca.com/54997.

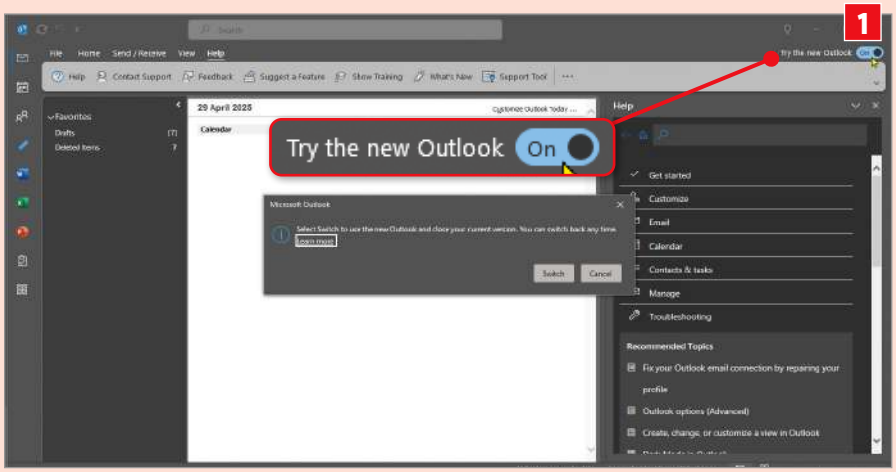
Gaming laptops such as this Alienware model house powerful cooling systems within their chunky design

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

The different versions of Outlook?

Q I can't be the only reader who is confused by the various versions of Outlook, and the way Microsoft refers to them. For as long as I can remember I have used the full desktop version of Outlook that came with the various editions of Microsoft's Office suite. I now have the subscription-based Office 365 Family suite with (full) Outlook. Is this now called Outlook 365? If I understand correctly, there's also the purely web-based Outlook email service (formerly Hotmail) and a simple Outlook app that comes with Windows (previously called Mail) and this appears to be in two versions. Help! I simply don't understand why Microsoft has given all these different tools the same name.

Brian Darracott



If you opt to try the new Outlook, it will download to your PC but not replace the old version, leaving you with both

A In a sensible world, questions like this would give Microsoft pause for thought, because you're absolutely not alone. The branding of Microsoft products, and in particular its email tools, causes endless headaches for both us and our readers. In short, it's a complete mess and very difficult to unpick. What's more, product names seem to change at the drop of a hat, and it would be typical if Microsoft were to alter the line-up again just as this issue goes to press – but we'll have a go.

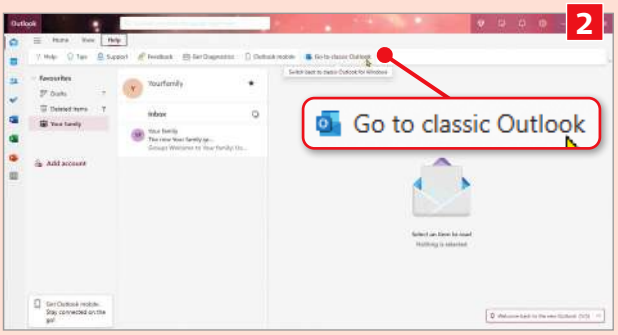
So, the version you're using now is the full desktop version of Outlook that comes with Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365). Some people call this Outlook 365, but that's not its official name. This paid-for version is sometimes referred to as 'classic' Outlook. But it's just called Outlook.

Then there's the newer 'Outlook for Windows', which comes with Windows 11. This is also available as a free download for Windows 10 from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/54758). It's a pared-back version of Outlook that was intended to replace the old Windows Mail and Calendar apps – which, just for the record, were and still are a single app package that launches with one of two different interfaces.

To confuse matters further, the (free) Outlook for Windows can coexist on the same PC with the classic (paid-for) Outlook (see screenshot 1). In other words, you can literally have both versions installed on your computer, and if you use Windows 11, you probably have. And if that wasn't confusing enough, Microsoft currently allows users of the newer (free) Outlook for Windows to switch back to the old Outlook for Windows interface by clicking a slider in the program's settings. This is labelled 'Go to classic Outlook' 2, although in this context 'classic' means the previous version of the (free) Outlook for can Windows, not the 'classic' (paid-for) Outlook that comes with Microsoft 365.

Then there's Outlook.com, which is the webmail version of Outlook that evolved from Hotmail. This is tied to a Microsoft account and is free to use. Increasingly, and intentionally, both the desktop and web versions of Outlook are converging to a single, familiar look. This makes it even harder than ever to tell one desktop version from another.

Finally, we should mention that there are versions of Outlook for Apple iPhones, iPads and Mac computers, as well as for Android smartphones and tablets. Thankfully, these are all just called 'Outlook' – or at least they were as we went to press!



Microsoft lets users of the free Outlook for Windows switch back to the 'classic' interface,

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next Issue ON SALE Weds 2 July

- Can I automate inputting my email address?
- Can I move this large AppData folder?
- How do we get internet at sea? ...And many more

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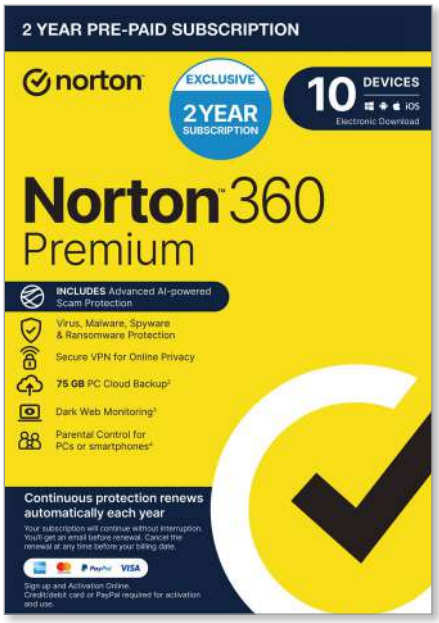


Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

10 devices for two years NOW ONLY £19.99*

Normally £179.99

Buy it from our Software Store at www.snipca.com/33247

*while stocks last

Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

Why can't I download Wintoys?

Q Every time I try to download Wintoys by following your link (www.snipca.com/54456) in Issue 708, page 18 I get a 'PUR-AuthenticationFailure' message. Can you help?

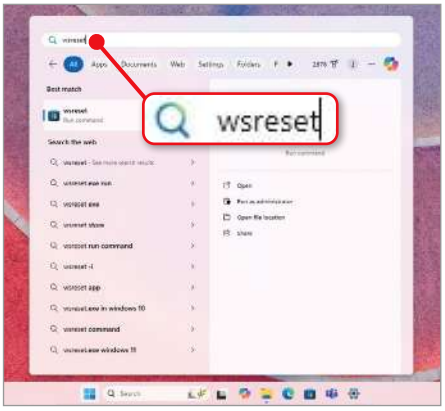
Phil James

A This usually means your Microsoft Store app's cache has become corrupted. Try resetting it by clicking Start, typing wsreset (see screenshot below) and pressing Enter. The Microsoft Store app will automatically relaunch and you can try downloading Wintoys again.

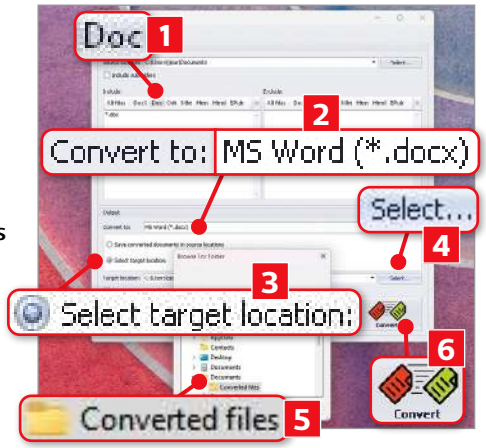
The error can also be caused by a conflict with your PC's region settings. Check that Windows is set to the correct region and that the time is also correct (under Settings, then 'Time & language').

Alternatively, in Windows 10 try running the Windows Store Apps troubleshooter: click Start, Settings, 'Update & Security', Troubleshoot, then 'Additional troubleshooters' to do this. Windows 11 doesn't offer this option.

As a last resort, try downloading Wintoys via the Microsoft Store website, rather than via the Microsoft Store app. Type the Snipca link above into your browser's address bar, then click the Download button, rather than 'View in Store'. Click the downloaded exe file, then install the app.



If you see a 'PUR-AuthenticationFailure' message, type wsreset to reset the Microsoft Store's cache



Use MultiDoc Converter to batch-convert .doc files to .docx

Can I batch-change file endings in LibreOffice?

Q In Issue 708's feature 'File formats that will soon die' (page 62) you said the .doc and .xls formats will soon be discontinued. I use LibreOffice and know how to change individual file endings, but can I 'batch' change these endings in all my files?

John Blakemore

A It's important to remember that just changing the file extension won't convert your files to another format – each file needs to be re-saved to a newer format. There isn't a way to convert multiple files with LibreOffice, so try the free program MultiDoc Converter (www.snipca.com/54930).

It's safe to use, but your browser may show a security warning. Edge, for example, will show a notification saying the setup.exe "can't be downloaded securely". Hovering your cursor next to this will reveal a 'More actions' button (three dots) – click this, then click Keep followed by 'Keep anyway'.

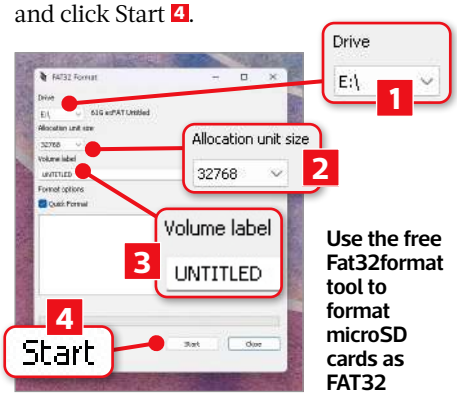
Install the program then launch it. Click the Select button next to 'Source location', then navigate to the folder where your .doc files are stored. Click to select it then click OK (ticking 'Include subfolders' if you need to). Under 'Include', click the 'Doc' button (1 in our screenshot left) and, in the 'Convert to' dropdown menu, select 'MS Word (*.docx)' 2. Rather than overwriting your existing files, choose 'Select target location' 3, then click Select 4 next to the 'Target location' box and create a new 'Converted files' folder 5 (or similar) to save your converted documents to. Click the Convert button 6 when you're ready. Carry out the same procedure with your .xls files.

Why can't I format my microSD card?

Q I've tried to format a 64GB microSD card in FAT32, as you explained in Issue 709 (page 64), but I get the error message 'volume is too large'. Am I doing something wrong?

Douglas Ferguson

A If our Windows command-line instructions don't work trythe free program Fat32format. With your microSD card connected to your PC, visit www.snipca.com/54931 and click the screenshot to download the tool (it's a portable app, so there's nothing to install). Select your microSD card's drive letter in the Drive dropdown menu (1 in our screenshot below). Leave the 'Allocation unit size' setting at its default 2, then give your card a name under 'Volume label' 3 and click Start 4.



Use the free Fat32format tool to format microSD cards as FAT32

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

3DMark Stress Test Benchmark test that repeatedly runs a graphics workout on computers to see if they stay stable and cool under heavy use.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

Architecture A set of rules and language that govern how hardware and software work.

ARM Processors that are more energy-efficient and are used in more devices than those made by AMD and Intel.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Botnet A group of infected computers connected together via the internet, and used to infect other PCs, send junk email and perform other criminal tasks.

Buffering Downloading a certain amount of data before starting to play a video. Can cause delays to your streaming.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Cast To send content from your PC to TV.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A program designed to recreate conversation with humans.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Codec A file that tells a PC how to record or play a type of media file.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time. In Windows this is called **Command Prompt**.

Compatibility mode A setting in Windows that allows you to run programs that would otherwise only run in older versions of Windows.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool. Also used to classify Windows 11 PCs with a neural processing unit (NPU) that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor browser.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

DNS A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

Dolby Atmos Surround-sound technology that adds 'height' to audio.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

DRM Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

Dual-band router A Wi-Fi router that operates on two bands: 2.4 and 5GHz.

Dual-SIM A phone that holds two SIM cards, letting you use services from two different networks.

DVI A type of display connector that can carry a digital signal.

Emulator A program that makes one computer act like another so it runs that computer's software.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

exFAT Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives, and still used for some portable drives.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Firmware Basic software stored on hardware to control its operation.

Flash memory A type of memory that can retain information without a power source.

Fps Frames per second. Used to indicate gaming performance.

Freemium A business model, especially on the internet, where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

Geo-restricted Content such as TV programmes and films that's intended to be watched only in a specific country.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second.

GIF A type of image file often used on the web, but now largely superseded by PNG.

Gigabit Internet connection offering speeds of at least 1Gbps.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI A connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

Heat sink A block of metal used to help dissipate heat from a PC chip.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IP address A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and more accurate colours.

ISBN International Standard Book Number. A 10- or 13-digit code used to identify books.

JPEG A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Lithium-ion A rechargeable energy storage device for electronics.

mAh Milliamp hours. A unit that measures (electric) power over time. The higher the mAh, the longer a battery will last.

Mechanical keyboard Keyboards that use a spring-loaded mechanism to press a physical switch.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

MicroUSB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

Mirror To display on your TV what's on your PC or tablet screen.

MVNO Mobile virtual network operator. A mobile provider that piggybacks on another network rather than its own.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared with other PCs.

NTFS A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

OLED A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in PC and TV screens.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition rather than a password.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

PVR Personal video recorder. Set-top boxes that let you pause and record digital TV.

QLED Screen technology that uses nanoparticles to boost brightness and colour.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

Quantum Dot HDR A screen technology that uses quantum dots to enhance brightness, colour accuracy and contrast.

RAM The computer's working area.

Recovery key A password to access a locked account.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device repaired by its manufacturer to be resold.

Response time How fast a coloured pixel turns to white and back again.

RGB Advanced type of LED that generates colours by projecting simultaneous combinations of red, green and blue lights.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data via overseas mobile networks.

SD card A type of memory card.

SIM The smart card used by all mobile phones.

SIM-only A phone package in which you pay only for the data, calls and texts.

Splash screen A program's opening screen, shown before the home page.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Stealer log A file of stolen data such as passwords, cookies and personal info collected by malware from infected devices.

Subwoofer A speaker designed to reproduce deep bass sounds only.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a PC.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VGA An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WebP Google's image format designed to create files that are smaller for the same quality.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard that's up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with maximum speed of 46Gbps.

Wi-Fi calling Lets you make and receive voice and video calls over a Wi-Fi connection.

XLS The file format for Microsoft Excel before version 2007.

Broadband Deals

	Provider	Package Name	Monthly Price	Contract Length	Broadband Speed	Reward*	First-year Cost*
1	vodafone	Fibre Fibre 150	**£26.00** £29.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	**150Mbps** avg. speed	**£105** Gift Card	CHEAPEST **£213.00**
2	sky	Full Fibre 500	**£28.00** Price could change during contract	24 Months	**500Mbps** avg. speed	**£80** Gift Card	**£256.00**
3	3	Three 5G Hub	**£19.00** £21.00 from 1st April 2026	24 Months	**150Mbps** avg. speed	**N/A**	**£232.00**
4	Virgin media	M125	**£23.99** £27.49 from April 2026 Bill	18 Months	**132Mbps** avg. speed	**£80** Bill Credit	**£214.88**

* Payments based on 12x monthly cost (including price rise) minus reward value

*Reward subject to change. Available as of 4th June 2025.

GO COMPARE

Easy when you

Know How

Hoping to make his interactions with Google Gemini more useful, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Create his own AI chatbot

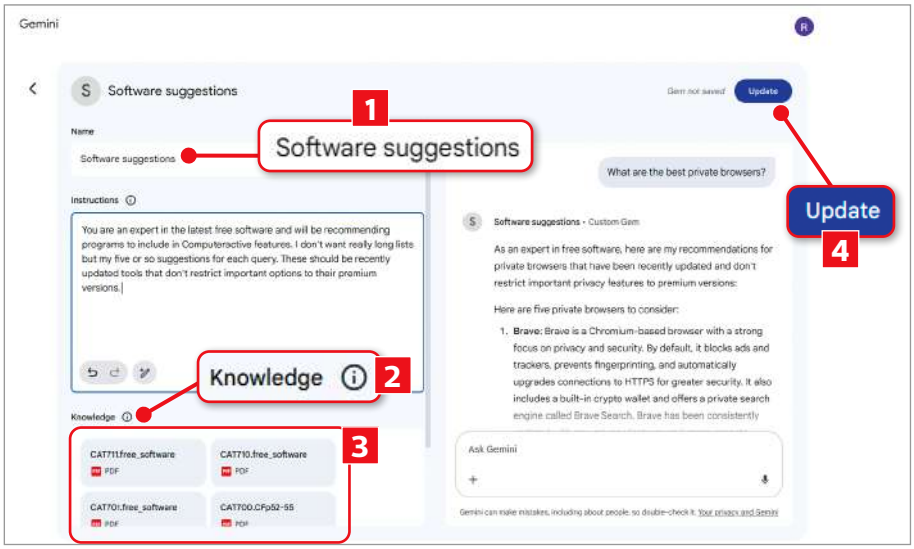
After writing our epic comparison of AI chatbots in Issue 711's Cover Feature, I took a break from talking to ChatGPT, Claude and the rest, and spoke to some real people. Not for too long, mind: just enough to order drinks at the bar and a bag of chips on the way home.

> How simple would it be to create a chatbot without having any coding skills?

However, I couldn't resist the urge to chat to our Gold Award winner, Google Gemini, which so impressed me during my tests. But my random – and perhaps slightly inebriated – prompts produced a strange, stilted conversation that I deleted from embarrassment the next morning.

I then realised I hadn't dug deeply into Gemini's Gems option (www.snipca.com/54972), other than a brief mention in our feature. Gems lets you create your own personal chatbots. Like ChatGPT's custom GPTs, these perform specific types of task, so you can keep your chats focused and not veer into messy rambles. It also means you don't have to explain what you want every time you enter similar prompts. Best of all, since March, Gems has been available to all Gemini users – without a subscription.

I therefore decided to find out how simple it would be to set up my own 'gem', with no coding skills or much imagination. I frequently have to check past issues of *Computeractive* to see which programs we've recommended, so I figured my chatbot could specialise in suggesting free software.


Gemini
Software suggestions
Update
1
Software suggestions
Name
Software suggestions
What are the best private browsers?
Instructions
You are an expert in the latest free software and will be recommending programs to include in Computeractive features. I don't want really long lists but my five or so suggestions for each query. These should be recently updated tools that don't restrict important options to their premium versions.
Update
4
Software suggestions · Custom Gem
As an expert in free software, here are my recommendations for private browsers that have been recently updated and don't restrict important privacy features to premium versions:
Here are five private browsers to consider:
1. Brave: Brave is a Chromium-based browser with a strong focus on privacy and security. By default, it blocks ads and trackers, prevents fingerprinting, and automatically upgrades connections to HTTPS for greater security. It also includes a built-in crypto wallet and offers a private search engine called Brave Search. Brave has been consistently
Knowledge
2
Knowledge
3
CAT711.free_software
CAT710.free_software
CAT701.free_software
CAT700.CFp52-55
Ask Gemini

Robert used Gemini's free Gems feature to create and customise his own AI chatbot

To get started, I opened the Gemini app on my Android phone (www.snipca.com/54877), tapped my profile icon and chose 'Gem manager'. Here, Google had thoughtfully provided five of its own gems, including Brainstormer ("fresh ideas for parties, gifts, businesses and more"), 'Career guide' and 'Learning coach'. But to create my own chatbot (which would hopefully be more useful than Google's rather corporate examples), I was directed away from the Gemini app to access the New Gem page in my browser at www.snipca.com/54975.

This online tool told me to give my gem a name. I toyed with 'Gerald', before concluding that wasn't sufficiently descriptive, so plumped for the duller but more accurate 'Software suggestions' (1 in our screenshot). Gemini automatically updated its Preview pane to show my new chatbot's name.

Next, I entered instructions for the gem, to tailor the type of tasks I wanted it to perform, along with its required level of knowledge and the quality of answers I expected. Gemini suggested I try a sample prompt to test the chatbot, so I asked it to recommend the best private browsers. I was pleased to note its response adhered to my strict instructions, while still being reliable and informative.

I clicked Save to create my 'Software suggestions' gem, then saw I could make its answers even more relevant. Gemini has a clever Knowledge option 2 that lets you upload up to 10 files for the chatbot to use for reference. I selected a handful of PDFs of software-themed articles 3 and clicked Update 4 to feed the new knowledge to my gem. Sure enough, its subsequent answers referenced previous software recommendations without me needing to look them up myself.

My new chatbot appeared in the Gems list in Gemini's web interface and mobile apps, giving me instant access to its expertise. It's since been joined by more gems I've made that provide recipe ideas, plan days out in the UK and – somewhat inevitably – generate pictures of animals with hats on.

Gems couldn't be easier to create, and save you wondering what you were thinking (or drinking) when you revisit your chats later.

Need help with chatbots? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tests the safety of his browser extensions

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